THE CLAYBORNES

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"DO YOU PROMISE SOLEMNLY?" SHE INQUIRED (Page 91)

THE CLAYBORNES

A Romance of the Civil War

BY

WILLIAM SAGE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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TO MY FRIEND

HERBERT SANFORD CARPENTER

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	The Clayborne Blood	1
II.	Regina Bowie	20
III.	The Clayborne Horse	31
IV.	Regina's Toast	51
V.	A Hot Ride after Grant	77
VI.	Marjorie Ware	84
VII.	In the China-Closet	93
VIII.	A Sudden Parting	107
IX.	A Few Old Letters	114
X.	Benjamin Chesterfield, Non-Combatant	127
XI.	Chesterfield's Captive	148
XII.	A Letter from the Front	166
XIII.	The Prisoner on the River Queen	168
XIV.	A Woman is an Awkward Prisoner	181
XV.	The River Queen's Boiler	200
XVI.	In Vicksburg and out	218
XVII.	Ulysses takes his Troy	238
XVIII.	Before the Court	249
XIX.	Love and Doubt	264
XX.	A Volume of Emerson	282
XXI.	The House at the Cross-Roads	289
XXII.	Marjorie Ware and Regina Bowie	306
XXIII.	Richmond	322
XXIV.	At the Stone Bridge	335
XXV.	The Tenants of the Cross-Roads	345
XXVI.	Four Sturdy Knaves	359
XXVII.	The Last of the Clayborne Horse	374
XXVIII.	The Clayborne Brothers	388
XXIX.	A Third of a Century later	400

THE CLAYBORNES

CHAPTER I

THE CLAYBORNE BLOOD

A YOUNG woman sat at the piano playing a martial air. Under the touch of her white hand the instrument spoke. It told of the glory of war, the grandeur and crash of the battle, of the intrepid charge and the valiant defense; it told of conquest and honor, of the laurel wreath; the triumph of victory. The color rose high to the woman's cheek and her eyes flashed with the fire and enthusiasm of youth. She put her spirit into the music and it stirred the blood and thrilled the pulse of the man who stood near her. The music had no note of discord or death, of disease or famine; of homes made desolate and hearts wrung with anguish and misery; for the player was young and full of life and beauty. The man who listened did not hear the moan of the wounded, the cry of the destitute, for he was rich in the strength and courage and hope of youth.

"What do you think of that, Clifford Clay-

borne?" exclaimed the girl, turning upon her chair. "Could you march to that music?"

"I could follow that music to the end of the world, Regina," was the quick rejoinder.

In playful challenge the girl's finger ran again over the keys, sending forth an inspiring march; while she looked over her shoulder at Clifford, — dashing Clifford Clayborne, who always had a soft word for a woman and an open hand for a friend.

It was in Richmond in the spring of '61. The news of the fall of Sumter was ringing through the land. The South, with all its ardor and fiery zeal, was arming itself for the coming fray. The North, set on fire by the guns from South Carolina, was rallying to defend the national flag. The Rebellion had begun.

It raged fiercely in the bosom of Regina Bowie; it shone in her eyes, it tingled to the very tips of her fingers as they struck out notes of defiance to the North. Had she been her father's son, Colonel Bowie would have had a son outrivaling him in hot impetuous zeal for the cause.

Colonel John Bowie, a native of South Carolina, had come to Virginia three years before the outbreak of the war. He had taken up his residence as the neighbor of his friend, Judge Clayborne, whom he had known in boyhood. Bowie, one of the hottest-headed fire-eating men in all the South, had been persistent in his cry for "slavery and no compromise," "secession and fight."

Judge Clayborne, however, had been one of the cooler heads, who, on the floor of the Virginia Legislature, held the State for the Union until the final die was thrown. But when Virginia cast in her lot with the seceding States, Bowie held out his hand to his lifelong comrade. "Now, Clayborne, where do you stand?"

"With you to the death, John Bowie," cried Clayborne, and he meant it too, as his fingers closed over the colonel's hand.

"I knew we could count on you when the time came, Joe. We've had many a hot argument, and you've often made me mad. But I knew you were true as steel, or, damn me, I'd have disowned you."

"John, old fellow, the time for argument is past. I've done my best to have the South do what was wisest. The majority have overruled me; but the Claybornes from father to son, from the earliest times, have lived in Virginia; they are part of its soil, and, sir, the Claybornes will fight for Virginia. I've got two boys, Colonel, and by gad, sir, you'll see us three together in defense of the sacred soil of our State. Shoulder to shoulder the Claybornes fight, shoulder to shoulder the Claybornes stand or fall!"

"Give me your hand once more, Joe Clayborne. You make my heart warm towards you more than it has for years. Let us take a drink to the success of the Southern Confederacy and then we'll go and talk over the matter of recruiting, for you must have a regiment."

"And my son Gordon," exclaimed Judge Clayborne, as the two friends set down their glasses on the bar; "I want him to have a good command. Gordon is like me, Colonel; he was opposed to the policy of secession, but now that we are in for it, and the honor of Virginia is at stake, he 'll be red-hot for war."

"By gad, he shall have a good command, Joe. He 's a West Pointer. He 's a man we need. He shall have a captaincy at once. You must have him in your regiment. I am to be a brigadier-general; I got my commission from the Confederate Congress last week, but I did not tell you then because I wanted to wait until Virginia was unequivocally with us."

"Well, Virginia has made her position known, John, and I mine. We are all with you to the end."

"God bless you, old friend," replied Bowie. "Come, let us discuss the important problem of raising and arming troops."

"Has any one seen my son Gordon?" inquired Clayborne of a knot of gentlemen who stood in animated discussion in front of the convention hall.

"I saw him riding off down the street about half an hour ago, judge. I reckon he 's gone off to spread the news."

"Thank you, Major Mattheson. He 's gone off home to tell his brother Clifford, and we 'll find the boys with the campaign all laid out and the

Yankees all whipped before night. Let us enter into the fight with the same spirit as that of the youngsters."

Lieutenant Gordon Clayborne, of the United States Army, had graduated at West Point two years before, and during this first period of his career he had seen rough service upon the plains and on the border of Mexico. He was now at home upon the first leave of absence granted him since he had put on the uniform and sworn allegiance to the stars and stripes.

Lieutenant Clayborne, deeply stirred by the momentous epoch in history which had that day occurred, rode towards the family mansion, not fast and furious, to be the first to bring the news to the household, but at a much slower pace than usual, with thoughtful mien and an expression of care upon his face.

The announcement that the great State of Virginia had actually cast off her allegiance to the Union and had thrown her prestige and power with the Confederacy was received throughout the city with the wildest enthusiasm. Upon every side the news was being spread. Bells were ringing, cannons were sounding, and people were assembling amid excitement and rejoicing.

As Gordon drew near his home, he found that the news had preceded him, and he met young Pendleton riding away. The latter reined up his foam-flecked horse.

"I 've told Clifford. He 's coming to the meeting

to-night and says he 'll bring you along. Regina Bowie is in there. She says she will make a banner for the first regiment of horse. She is an amazon to be proud of. Going to be at the muster, Gordon? Good-by, old man." And without stopping for any reply, the breathless Pendleton waved his hand and galloped away on his pony.

Gordon rode up the driveway to the door of his father's handsome house. It was towards the close of a beautiful spring day. Across the green lawn lay the long shadows of the afternoon, the robins were piping their mellow evening notes, and the slanting rays of the sun were shining in through the large windows of the generous mansion. A soft breeze rustled the lace curtains and as they parted he could see his brother Clifford standing near the piano while Regina played.

To the sound of the triumphal music Gordon entered the house and went upstairs to his room.

The room was a study shared by the two brothers. At one end stood the shelves with the books which they had studied and read together. At the other was an arsenal of rifles and fowling-pieces, hunting-knives and pistols. There was the fly-rod with which Clifford had caught his first trout. There was the rifle with which Gordon had shot his first deer.

Upon the wall at each side of the fireplace hung a portrait. One was of their father; the dark curly hair, the slender nose, the proud curved lip, were Clayborne features. The sweet-faced woman

upon the opposite side was their mother. Joseph Clayborne had found in New England the woman who became his wife. The young Southerner had been sent to Europe to put a final polish to his education. After spending two years abroad he returned to his own country, making a visit with friends of his family in Boston. Young Joseph was a gallant gentleman at this time, fresh from the life in the gay capitals of Europe. He excited curiosity, interest, and finally love in the breast of the young puritan maid. And on his side the heart which had proved invulnerable to the charms of both French and English beauties was soon at the feet of this prim little New England rose. The cavalier and the puritan were united. Clayborne transplanted his delicate flower from the rocky soil of the East to the luxuriant land of Virginia.

Mrs. Clayborne had been a devoted wife, living in the aspirations and ambitions of her husband. Her delicate body had not caused her to shrink from the responsibilities which such a life entailed. She had stood to the task nobly. The slaves they owned were so many human souls committed to her care. To look after their welfare, moral and physical, was to her a solemn duty. If they were sick, she ministered to them, if their feet strayed from the path of virtue, she tried to set them right. Slavery was a heavy burden for such as Mrs. Clayborne. Bravely she bore it until it killed her.

Into this beautiful face Gordon looked long and earnestly; from it his eyes turned to his father's

virile, animated countenance. Then he walked through the apartment into his brother's bedchamber and back into his own room with a quick, nervous tread.

"Clifford," exclaimed Regina in the drawing-room beneath, "is not that Gordon upstairs? I wonder why he did not come in here and tell us the latest news."

"I did not hear him enter the house," was the reply.

"Neither did I, but I know his step, and that is it on the floor above."

"I will see if it is he, and find out why he did not come into the drawing-room," and Clifford ran swiftly upstairs.

"Gordon!" he exclaimed as he entered the room. "What is the matter. Are you ill?"

"No, I am quite well, Clifford."

"But your face has such a strange disturbed look. Has anything happened to father?"

"No, Clifford."

"But I never saw you look like this before; you look five years older than you did yesterday. Look at your face in the glass, man."

The two young men were much alike and resembled their father. They had the same dark curly hair and white brow, the same frank open countenance. A little more than two years separated them in age. Gordon was somewhat heavier than Clifford, and taller, his chin was more determined, and at times his eyes wore a serious expres-

sion which never came to Clifford's face. Clifford's spirits were always like the air he breathed. He never knew melancholy. He was as gallant as Mars, with that courage which ignores danger because it does not know fear. His respect for the "code" and his belief in "righting a wrong where it is given" had taken him more than once on to the "field of honor." Strange to say, he was a villainously poor shot, and so his adversaries had come off scathless; and as for Clifford himself, a protecting Providence seems to have watched over the boy, and save for a bullet hole through his coat and a small scratch on the arm, his duels had been bloodless.

"For the Lord's sake, Gordon," cried Clifford, as the former threw himself into an armchair, "what has come over you? I thought you would come home all afire, and you are as cold and taciturn as a mummy. I've been at work all the morning getting names for a company. The girls are at work on a banner to be given to the first complete organization. We'll go to the meeting in the hall to-night. You'll get a commission the first thing. Lord, but I wish I had your experience, Gordon," rattled the younger brother as he sat on the edge of the table.

"I'm not going to the meeting to-night," said Gordon quietly.

"Not going!" cried his brother, springing to the floor in his astonishment; "why you'll miss your chance of getting one of the first commissions.

You are certain to be made a captain at once, and perhaps a major."

"I could not accept such a commission, Clifford."

The younger man could not find words to speak.

"You know right well," the elder brother continued, speaking in a low voice, "that I am an officer in the United States Army."

"There are no United States," cried Clifford.

"There is a Federal Army."

"How does that concern you? General Twigg gave all the officers of the —— regiment leave of absence, expecting they would go to their homes and give their services to the Confederacy."

"I cannot judge of General Twigg's motives. I have just received an order from the War Department to report at Washington."

"And you are going to obey it?"

"I am going to obey it."

"Well, damn me, Gordon!"

"Clifford," said his brother, "you know I have been opposed to secession. I have often spoken against it publicly and privately, but apart from that, I have taken a solemn oath of allegiance to the United States. Would you have me break that oath?"

"If necessary, yes," cried Clifford vehemently; "but it is not necessary. The oath is no longer binding."

"It holds me."

"Then break it, Gordon. You are in duty bound to break it into a thousand pieces."

"Tell me, Clifford," and there was a note of deep earnestness in the elder man's voice, "have I ever said or done anything to make you think I would alter my convictions?"

Clifford struggled to suppress the tumult which his brother's words aroused within him. He tried to answer slowly and with coherence. "You have opposed secession, yes; so has father, so have many other Southern gentlemen, but now the time for argument has passed. Virginia *has* seceded and we must go with our State. Before Heaven, Gordon, I never dreamed that when the crucial moment came you would act otherwise."

"Clifford, old man, I have thought the matter all out in my own mind. I have struggled — oh, my dear boy, you can't realize how I have struggled, but I have always come out at the same ending: I was educated at West Point. I have taken an oath of allegiance to the Government. I must not violate it."

"By God, sir, I would violate it if it came in conflict with my duty to my State."

"Well, I cannot, I cannot!"

Clifford burst forth furiously.

"Can you forget what our family is and what are its traditions? Can you see those of your own blood going to the front to do their duty as men, and not be stirred to strike one blow for the State we love? Gordon! Think for a moment what will be said of you, of us — I cannot bear it. I had rather see you dead at my feet."

"And our country, Clifford, which as boys we were taught to love, — shall we strike at her? Do you remember how as boys we pored over the pages of history, glorying in the brave deeds of our war of independence? The heroes of those days shed their blood for a united country, not for a part of it. The work of those great men who framed the Constitution, who gave their brains, their fortunes, and their lives in the building of a nation, gave them for a whole nation, not for Virginia alone. We are descended from some of those heroes, Clifford, and we owe our first allegiance to the country which is our heritage from them, — not to one section of it. No, not even to Virginia — God bless her!"

"Yes, God bless her! and it is to her we owe our nearest allegiance," said Clifford, "and we will fight under her flag."

Shouts and cheering were heard from the square in front of their house. Gordon put his hand affectionately upon his brother's shoulder, and together they walked toward the window. Clifford's brow was knitted and the emotions which he endeavored to control showed themselves upon his mobile face.

A large crowd had assembled in the square. From the flagstaff in the centre a United States flag was still flying proudly. Even as the brothers looked some one pulled upon the ropes and the flag came rapidly down, falling upon the ground at the man's feet. There was a momentary silence,

then amid frantic cheers another flag rose in its place.

"I have saluted the old flag so often, Clifford, that it wrenches my heart to see them take it down. That is the flag we have both been taught to love. Father used to teach us to cheer it when we were tiny boys. Can we forget that it is the same flag that Washington carried with him to Valley Forge in the hour of darkness, or which waved at Yorktown in the hour of triumph? Can we forget that it is the flag which enfolded the brave Lawrence as he lay dead upon the Chesapeake? Are we to trample it beneath our feet now?"

"Yes," replied Clifford hotly, "since the North has forced the issue — upon them the shame. Virginia will be true to herself."

"And I must be true to myself," replied Gordon with equal warmth.

"Think what will be said of you," cried Clifford. "Men will call you a Yankee, a coward, an Abolitionist, and I shall hang my head with shame. I cannot bear it."

"You forget that our mother came from New England, Clifford."

"Yes, but she married a Southern gentleman."

"Am I a coward, Clifford?"

"I should like to see the man who would call a Clayborne a coward in my presence," replied his brother defiantly.

"Am I an Abolitionist?"

"No, thank Heaven, you are not that. However absurd, however fanatical your opinion in regard to the Union, you are no Abolitionist." Clifford stormed up and down the room. "It is the Abolitionists who are the cause of the war," he exclaimed bitterly, "they will prolong slavery a hundred years. It is their intolerance which has forced the South into her position. Why could they not leave us alone with our slavery? If it is a curse, it is our curse, not theirs!"

In his excited march he stumbled over a valise which lay half concealed on the floor, near the table. "What the devil!" he cried, looking down to see what had tripped him. Then recovering himself he said with forced calmness, "Gordon, you have already been packing to go away?"

"Yes."

"When are you going?"

"To-morrow morning."

"You shall not go. You shall not fight for the Abolitionists!"

"I have got to obey orders."

With blazing eyes Clifford confronted his brother. "That you *shall* not do!" he cried excitedly. "You shall never be a traitor."

Gordon's face flushed. "Do not use that term. I can bear much from you with patience, but not that."

"I would to Heaven it were not so, but I shall speak the truth. If you are a traitor, you must become accustomed to the name."

"Clifford!" cried Gordon, seizing his brother by the arms.

"Take your hands off, traitor!"

"Not until you unsay that word."

Clifford's only answer was to struggle to break his brother's hold, breathing quickly through his clenched teeth.

"Take back that word and I will let you go."

"You are stronger than I," panted Clifford; "you are stronger, and you use your strength like a coward."

"Go!" said Gordon, pushing Clifford from him — "go before I hurt you."

"You shall not leave this house yet, Gordon Clayborne," cried Clifford. "You shall not disgrace our name while I live."

As he spoke thus in great excitement, he ran to the cupboard and drew down a box, which he placed upon the centre of the table with a bang.

"The side which you have chosen pits brother against brother," he said hoarsely; "so be it, but let the fight begin here and now," and he took from the box a pair of old-fashioned dueling pistols.

"Clifford, are you mad? What would you do?"

"Protect the honor of my name and of yours, Gordon Clayborne, for either you will fight me here in this room, or you will give up your purpose to join the North."

"Clifford, put up those pistols!"

"Will you fight?"

"No!"

Clifford went to the door, locked it, and threw the key on the floor. He was deadly pale. Taking the pistols from their case, he laid them upon the table.

"By God, you *shall* fight, sir," cried Clifford passionately; "you *shall* fight, or be a coward as well as a traitor."

With a bound the elder sprang across the room and caught the younger brother by the arms. They struggled together violently for a few moments, their anger rising to white heat; Gordon, stronger than Clifford, was bending him to the floor.

"Coward, coward!" panted the latter through his teeth; "coward and traitor!"

Gordon, his Clayborne blood surging hot with passion, threw his brother from him. "Damn you, Clifford, if you will have it, I'll fight you now."

"I will have it, Gordon," replied Clifford, drawing a deep breath.

From his brother's passionate face, Gordon's eye chanced to rest on the portrait of their mother, and he controlled his own anger suddenly.

"Clifford, a duel at such short range means death to both of us."

"Better death to both than dishonor to either," was the reply.

"So be it," exclaimed Gordon, and taking up the pistols he proceeded to load them.

Clifford stood near the door with arms folded, struggling to appear master of himself.

"Will you count, or shall I?" he asked huskily.

Gordon, who was now cool and self-possessed, walked across the room to a large old-fashioned clock that stood in the corner. Turning the minute hand until it pointed within a few moments of six, he replied: "At the last stroke of the hour we will fire."

"Very well," bowed Clifford in assent, and took up his position by the door.

Gordon stepped to the farther end of the room. The brothers faced each other with a scant seven paces between them.

"I declare to you, Gordon, upon my soul," cried Clifford, "I would gladly stand here unarmed and receive your fire, if by so doing I could turn you from your purpose."

"My purpose is unalterable, Clifford."

The pistols were leveled.

One! The perspiration stood on Clifford's forehead. His hand shook. "Damn you, Gordon, you 're as cool as ice."

Two! Clifford straightened himself and compressed his lips.

The clock continued to strike in slow, deep-toned, musical notes.

Three!

Four!

Five!

Six!

There was a blinding discharge of flame and smoke with a crash that awoke the echoes of the old house and shook the windows in their casements. As the smoke lifted, and began to drift through the open window, it disclosed Clifford standing mute and horror-stricken, while Gordon leaned against a chair, a mark of burnt powder above his temple. With a cry Clifford sprang forward and caught his brother in his arms: "Gordon, have I killed you? I swear I did not mean it! I swear I did not mean it! Speak and tell me you are not badly hurt. I aimed at your arm, I wanted to disable you so you could not go — my hand trembled, I'm such a damned bad shot — Oh, Gordon, I have killed you!"

Gordon straightened himself up. "I am not hurt."

"Not hurt!" repeated Clifford in wonder. "But you are wounded in the head."

"It is nothing," and Gordon wiped the spot away with his handkerchief. "I am not wounded."

"Thank God!" ejaculated his younger brother reverently. "I thank God. I aimed at your arm, Gordon, but I might have killed you."

Gordon looked his brother full in the face while the moisture came into his own eyes as he said: "Clifford, that was made by the wadding; you don't suppose I'd load those pistols with balls, do you?"

Clifford stood in silence for a moment, then he put out his hand, which was clasped by his elder brother.

"Clifford, we have been together all our lives; we part now perhaps never to see each other again in this world, but, if we do meet, remember that we did not part in anger."

CHAPTER II

REGINA BOWIE

REGINA BOWIE heard voices raised in discord in the room above. She went to the door, hesitating whether or not to go upstairs and assume the rôle of peacemaker.

The brothers were not in the habit of quarreling, but once when they had fallen out, Miss Regina had thought it her duty to play the mediator. She had found it an ungrateful task, for both of the young belligerents had turned upon her and sent her away in great discomfiture. This had happened some years ago, but Regina had a retentive memory. "Let them settle it between them. I 'll go home, and when they come to me I shall find out all about it," she said to herself.

Miss Regina was right. After supper Clifford Clayborne appeared at her house. He had come to take her to the Town Hall where speeches were to be made; where troops were to be raised; where fervid eloquence and martial enthusiasm were to have full sway.

For almost the first time in his life Clifford's manner was moody, and his usually bright face was overcast as he stood in the hallway of the

Bowie mansion waiting for the young lady of the house to descend. As she came down the stairway she was a picture to dispel the cloud from any man's brow. She was a woman radiant with health and spirits. She seemed to impart the joy of living to all who came within her sphere.

"Why, where is Gordon?" she asked in surprise as she gave Clifford her hand.

"Gordon is at home," was the brief reply.

Clifford was evidently not in his usual expansive and communicative vein.

"The trouble must be more serious than I supposed," the young lady mused. "Is that all you have to say?" she inquired aloud.

"If you 're ready, we 'll go along," he answered.

She threw a fichu over her head with a careless gesture, at the same time making sure that one of her dark curls was coquettishly exposed. Looking at him seriously she asked abruptly: —

"What is the trouble between you two?"

Clifford's chagrin was so great that he was at first not inclined to speak. She laid her hand upon his arm, saying gently: —

"Come, tell me about it, Cliff," and led the way to the parlor.

In a few words he told her what had taken place between his brother and himself, omitting any mention of the bloodless duel.

She listened with amazement.

"We must prevent his going!" she exclaimed as Clifford finished.

"But how, Regina?"

"You have reasoned with him?"

"I have."

"Oh, a man's arguments; I know. You probably lost your tempers, both of you."

"Perhaps."

"Clifford, will you ask Gordon if he will not come over and see me?"

"It will be useless. You know how impossible it is to move Gordon."

"I will try it, Clifford," she replied, throwing her wrap off on to a chair with a gesture of determination. "We must keep him from this rash, foolish act, Clifford. We both of us must use all our power. Please see if he won't come over now. Merely tell him I should like to speak to him."

"Very well, Regina, I hope you may be successful;" and Clifford left the house.

"I must keep Gordon Clayborne from taking this irretrievable and ruinous step," she repeated to herself as she walked up and down the floor. "If you put the matter before him in its right light, I think you can influence him, Regina Bowie." And she paused before the figure reflected in the full-length mirror.

She did not have more than her fair share of vanity, but she could not help smiling at what she saw there. It was the graceful form of a young woman who was handsome and was sure of herself. Besides, enough men had told her of her beauty to

convince her, had she ever been the least skeptical on that point. The face was warm-tinted with health, and the eyes that smiled back at her were wondrous eyes. They could be merry or serious, they could look defiant or stern, or pleading or pathetic, they could flash with anger or burn with the soft light of love. They were valuable eyes, and their owner knew their value. She turned away from the mirror and sitting down in an arm-chair waited quietly for Gordon, with her chin resting in the hollow of her hand.

Regina Bowie was an influence within her social circle. She was clever, witty, a good companion, and gifted to a high degree with the power to please. Perhaps she exerted this power more with men than with women, for she was a greater favorite among the former. Very few were the men who came within the magic of her spell, who did not at one time or another give some manifestation of their tender regard. In fact so many young gentlemen had testified as to their ardent devotion that she had become accustomed to the avowals. As for Clifford Clayborne, he did not count. He had been in love with every pretty girl of his acquaintance; and he did not know any plain ones. Gordon, however, was different. Not that he was insensible to the charms of that sex which poets have called the fair, the false, the fickle, the weaker, the gentle, or the frail, as the mood dictated. The young fellow who at twenty-five has never thought himself in love must be an anomaly;

but Gordon was of a more serious turn of mind than the volatile Clifford.

Regina Bowie was a woman who could guard a secret thoroughly; still she could have told, had she been so minded, of an afternoon in the orchard, when the sunshine was bright, and the air rich with the fragrance of spring, when Gordon Clayborne showed her that he was — "like the others?" Well, not exactly, but he showed her that he was far from indifferent to her. All this had happened a little time ago, and they had since continued to be the best of friends.

Regina liked Gordon. She admired him for his strength, his courage, his manly bearing, and now she was grieved and shocked to learn that he could repudiate the cause which she held as sacred. She felt conscious that her power to move him had not altogether waned, and she set her lips firmly as she whispered to herself: "He shall not do this thing if I can keep him from it."

Gordon entered the room. She arose from her chair, came swiftly to him and gave him both her hands.

"I am glad you have come," she said in a soft, harmonious tone. "I hope it is to tell me that Clifford is mistaken! Oh, tell me that he is mistaken!"

"What Clifford said is true, Regina."

"You are going to fight for the Yankees?" she cried in a tone of horror, dropping his hands and stepping backward.

"I feel it my duty to serve the United States."

"They no longer exist," she replied scornfully.

"I am still in the United States Army," he answered, "but I can never make you understand my position, Regina."

"I will try to understand. I want to understand you, Gordon; sit down here and let me try."

She made room for him upon the sofa beside her and looked into his face intently.

"You know, Regina, you have known for a long time, what my convictions have been."

"I know," she replied softly. "And I know also that the same opinions were held by Early, Wickham, and many other splendid men; but they will now fight for the South, whatever were their previous opinions."

"I wish, Regina, oh, I sincerely wish I could feel as they do, but I cannot. I must follow my own convictions, no matter at what cost."

"I want you to follow them, Gordon; but I want you to follow the right course, don't you see?"

"I am following the right course. I wish it were not; I wish that I could change."

"How can it be the right one, when your father, your brother, every one is on the other side? How can you alone be right and they all be wrong? Oh, Gordon, why do I listen to you!" She rose to her feet with excitement. "If any other man should express even half a doubt as to the *success* of our arms I would cut his acquaintance," she

said passionately. "Yet I listen to you when you talk this treason. Do you know what I have been saying to myself these many days? I have said, When the time for action comes Gordon Clayborne will be found in the first rank, among the very bravest, fighting for our cause, and I can look upon him as a hero." Her voice dropped on the last words as if the confession had slipped from her lips unconsciously.

"I am no hero, Regina."

"You are brave and daring, Gordon; I have always known that. Be loyal and true."

"I must be loyal to the Nation's flag. I must follow it at whatever cost to myself," he answered.

"And at whatever cost to others?" she inquired, coming closer to him; "are you willing to make others unhappy by your action?"

There was a fascinating grace with which she dwelt upon the plural number of the word while her eyes and the soft accents of her voice gave it the meaning of the singular.

He could not look into those wonderful eyes without feeling how lovely and charming she was. She had often bewitched him with her captivating ways and her audacious spirit, but never had he felt her power to a greater degree than at this moment.

For a few moments he sat in silence. In his strong nature was that curious mixture, the dashing, chivalrous cavalier of the Clayborne blood that could not bear to deny a woman; and the stern, unyielding devotion to duty of his puritan mother.

These two conflicting elements were waging fierce war within him while Regina Bowie's hand rested appealingly upon his sleeve.

She could not understand the struggle taking place within him, and impatient at his silence burst forth passionately: "Oh! if I were a man! I should know how to fight — I should know how to win — but I 'm only a woman. The man whom I have always held to be both brave and gallant disavows our cause. He is unworthy. I should dismiss him from my thoughts — but I cannot. I feel his disgrace as if it were mine."

Gordon rose to his feet and paced the room feverishly. "I am deeply sorry that I give you cause for grief, but I must adhere to my resolve at whatever cost to myself or any one," he exclaimed firmly.

With that quickness which was her nature she struck the soft note again: —

"It is not alone the pain you cause me, but think of your father and your brother. Think of the proud record of your family in the past. Think of the future, Gordon. In the time which is coming Virginia will be made still more glorious by the valor of her sons! Are those who shall read the roll of honor not to see the name of Gordon Clayborne written there? Oh, Gordon, let me plead with you for the sake of your family, if not for my own! Let me plead with you for the sake of all those whom you hold dear, and who love you."

"Regina," he cried passionately, "you put me upon the rack, every word you speak is an added torture. If I could only make you realize the hours of doubt and struggle I have been through. How I have reasoned and argued with myself to come to but one decision. My position is different from my father's or my brother's. I am an officer in the Army of the United States. I have sworn allegiance to that government. I cannot break that oath. Do not ask me to do so, Regina."

"I would not ask you to do anything dishonorable. You know that, don't you, Gordon?"

"Let us say good-night and end this painful scene," he said quickly, putting out his hand. She took the proffered hand. "Try to think the very best you can of me, Regina," he said gently, "and even if you cannot understand my motives, believe that I am endeavoring to be true to myself."

"I shall always believe that, Gordon."

"Good-night, Regina."

"One word more," she exclaimed, detaining him by the arm. "In a case where two lines of duty seem to conflict, Gordon, is it not the course of an honorable man to choose the greater duty?"

"Yes."

"Then, if the duty that you owed to your State were greater than duty to the Federal Government, would you not be doing right to serve the former?"

"If it were greater, yes."

"But *it is*."

He shook his head sadly. "It all hinges on that. I cannot see it, Regina."

"Think it all over to-night," she pleaded earnestly. "Think of what I have said, and in the morning when I see you I am sure you will have changed."

"Good-night, Regina."

"You will think of what I have said?"

"How can I help it?"

"Good-night, Gordon."

He left her. She heard his quick footsteps on the gravel walk. She remained standing with a smile on her lips, but the spirit within her raged fiercely.

"How provoking he is, how obstinate! But I shall keep him with us. It will be more difficult than I imagined, but I *will* do it."

Gordon walked up and down the floor of his room. His interview with Regina had caused the struggle to be renewed within him. Late into the night he strode restlessly back and forth, his spirit torn by conflicting emotions. At last, worn out with mental and bodily fatigue, he threw himself down upon the bed fully dressed, and almost immediately fell asleep.

The next morning before breakfast, Miss Regina Bowie went out into her garden. Walking among the flowers she looked as fresh as the brightest that raised its head to the morning sunlight.

"Good-morning, Clifford," she called gayly to that young gentleman, who came out upon the

veranda of the neighboring house. She beckoned to him and he came slowly across the lawn and leaned his elbows on the fence. "Did you go to the meeting, last night, Clifford?"

"Yes."

"What was done? How were the speeches?"

"The speeches were good enough. We raised a company right there." Somehow Clifford did not speak with his accustomed vivacity. He had a listless manner as if he had slept badly.

Regina looked at him closely. "Have you seen your brother this morning?" she asked.

"No, Gordon 's gone. He went off before daylight. Gone to fight for the Yankees," with a bitter laugh.

Regina gave a start of genuine surprise. She turned pale. A curious light shone in her eyes. A look of disappointment and anger and resentment. She recovered herself quickly.

"Don't you think this is a beautiful primrose, Clifford?" she said. "Here, put it in your button-hole. And oh, Clifford, I 've got the banner almost done. Come into the house and see it."

CHAPTER III

THE CLAYBORNE HORSE

Colonel Joseph Clayborne had mustered his troop of horse and led them into camp. He rode at their front with his dark head erect, and a look of pride on his open, genial face. He did not disguise the pride which he took in the body of men who had rallied to his standard, but there was an expression of sadness in his eyes as he surveyed them and thought of his elder son who was not one of them. There was a catch in his voice as he gave a command to Major Colbert, and thought that it should have been to Major Gordon Clayborne. But he swallowed his sorrow and spoke to Colbert in that tone of familiar affection which so endeared him to his men.

Once in camp, Colonel Clayborne began to give his troopers a little taste of martial discipline. Discipline! these lusty young tyros did not know the meaning of the word! Wild harum-skarum young fellows they were for the most part: many of them wealthy, accustomed to indulgent ease; young bucks about town, fresh from the club and the drawing-room; sons of planters, dressed in broadcloth and fine linen, who had never lifted a finger in monotonous toil.

If they did not know discipline, they also did not know fear. Though they were used to luxury, and had taken the cream of life with the haughty assumption of rank, they could ride all day in the saddle without fatigue. They could endure cold and hunger, and at night could dine merrily on a crust of bread if nothing better was forthcoming.

They could fight. They had come out for that, and were quite willing to waive the tedium of drill and the restraint of discipline, and drive hot-headed towards the enemy. Colonel Clayborne, as a youth, had seen service in the Mexican war, and he was aware of the absolute necessity of organization, so by bullying and cajoling, he managed to bring together a goodly showing at the daily drills. The men were all hot for war, and when they discovered that the sooner they mastered the manual of arms the sooner they would get an opportunity to exercise them, every man among them threw himself into the task with ardor.

Out of the ranks, however, they were as untrammeled by military traditions as so many independent lords of the manor. Their camp resembled the famous "Field of the Cloth of Gold." Their personal equipment would have accommodated a brigade, and their body servants were a small army in themselves.

Those were sunny days of war before swords had crossed, before cannon had thinned the ranks and

blood had dimmed the lustre of gorgeous uniforms.

Daintily dressed ladies drove out daily to visit them, and vied with each other in courting the attentions of the brave warriors. "Camp Clayborne" looked like a flower-garden; and the only fatal shots came from Cupid's noiseless bow.

On one sunny afternoon Clifford Clayborne was leaning nonchalantly against a tree smoking a big black cigar. He was dressed in a new uniform which he had ordered with particular care from a fashionable tailor. The result, which would have been appropriate for a field-marshal, was entirely satisfactory to Clifford, who at present was a private in his father's troop of horse.

"Let the young man win his spurs," Colonel Clayborne had said, and placed his son in the ranks with Spartan firmness.

But whether an officer or a private, Clifford had a position to maintain, and he was always equal to his position. That afternoon Private Clayborne had been ordered by a lieutenant to do some guard duty, but the task had proved distasteful to him, so he had delegated the work and was cooling his spurs under the shade of an inviting tree while he puffed contentedly upon an Havana cigar. The lieutenant, in a uniform somewhat less magnificent than his subordinate's, strolled by.

"Hello, Clayborne, I thought you were detailed to guard duty."

"Too hot work on such an afternoon, Lieutenant."

"Dash it, Clayborne, you are going too far. Don't you mean to obey orders?"

"I 'll obey any orders that are sensible orders, but while we are still a hundred miles from any enemy, I 'll be damned if I 'm going to broil my skin in the hot sun to please any one."

"Colonel Clayborne says there must be more discipline in this camp; as an officer I 'm bound to enforce it. If you don't obey orders I shall report you, Mr. Clayborne."

"If you report me, there 'll be trouble between us, Lieutenant Marmaduke Preston. Now, I don't want to be unreasonable, but I think you owe me an apology."

"An apology?" gasped the lieutenant; "me apologize to a private?"

"No, sir, I don't ask that; but as one gentleman to another I demand one. You must have known that on this afternoon the duty assigned would be particularly distasteful to me. I told you I was expecting a party of ladies to drive out from town. I want to be in a position to show them some attention. You would have deprived me of the pleasure."

"Well, if that 's the case, Mr. Clayborne, I beg to express my regrets for the unfortunate order; of course I did not mean" —

"Oh, don't say anything further about it, Preston," exclaimed Clifford magnanimously. "Of course I want you to understand that under ordinary circumstances, if there is anything I can do at any time I shall be only too happy to oblige."

"Yes, of course," replied the lieutenant. Then his face brightening, he remarked: "There are some mules over there which have eaten their tethers and are at present making some little havoc among the supply wagons; could you make it convenient" —

"Certainly," replied Clifford heartily. "Here, Brutus," he called out to a negro who was at some distance, "come here at once."

"Yes, Marse Clayborne," cried the colored servant, running towards them.

"You catch those mules over there and tie them up some place securely. If you value your dusky hide, don't you let them get away. You understand?"

"'Deed I 'll be right careful, Marse Clayborne."

"Thank you, Clayborne," said the lieutenant. "What do you say to going up to headquarters? I think there 's a jolly party just driven up there. Miss Susie Brent and her cousin were in the carriage."

"I 'll join you with pleasure, Preston; will you have a cigar?"

"Thanks, yes." And the two young soldiers went off amicably together.

A young dandy was standing as sentry outside of the colonel's gate at headquarters. His face wore an expression of great tedium and he yawned from time to time wearily. His countenance lighted up somewhat at the sight of Clifford and the lieutenant.

"Cliff, my boy, have you got a cigar about you? I 'm bored to death standing here in the sun. I 've got another hour of it."

"You have my entire sympathy, Pendleton. But why don't you cut the job?"

"I would, but Major Colbert asked me to stay here and keep out any visitors while he has a confab with your father and General Beauregard, who has called. Got a match, Lieutenant, — thanks! The major is such a jolly good fellow, I like to oblige him," young Pendleton went on as he lit the cigar.

"The major 's a mighty good fellow," Clifford assented, leaning against the gate-post, "but he can't play cards worth a cent. A few of us were sitting in a little game at his quarters last evening and we got pretty near everything the major had."

"Sorry I was unable to be present, but I had an engagement up in the city last night. I did not get back until early this morning;" and young Pendleton yawned again.

"We got to playing for pay-vouchers and quartermaster's orders," said Clifford.

"Pay-vouchers and quartermaster's orders?" interrupted Pendleton. "What in the devil are those?"

"Why, did n't you know that we are getting pay from the C. S. Government?" demanded Lieutenant Preston.

"This is the first I 've heard of it," answered Pendleton.

"Well, we are. You 're getting your pay for standing out here now in the sun."

"Well, I 'm damned," exclaimed young Pendleton, laughing heartily. "So I 'm getting paid for drilling, and for fighting the Yankees; that beats me. Why, I never earned a cent in my life, and to think that there is a pecuniary consideration in all this army life just knocks me. Why, this is really earning your bread by the sweat of your brow, hey, Clifford!" and Pendleton laughed louder than ever.

"And what is more," Clifford replied, "the Government is going to supply every soldier with food and clothing."

"What!" cried Pendleton in open-eyed astonishment; "clothes too! By Jove, fellows, that 's like being charity boys, is n't it? Well, that is rich. I never expected to see the day when Buck Pendleton would be 'drawing his pay' or standing in line with a ticket 'entitling the bearer to one pair of new boots;'" and the young dandy laughed immoderately.

"There 's where the fun comes in," exclaimed Clifford; "it was only last night that we heard of this parental government system. Some of the boys were for refusing any remuneration whatever, as being beneath the dignity of a gentleman and a soldier to fight for hire; but little Cecil Granger suggested that we should play cards for the pay-vouchers. The boys took to the scheme at once. The consequence was I came away with a month of

Major Colbert's future pay, together with orders for two pairs of boots, a new coat, a woolen blanket, and I don't know how many pairs of regulation army pants."

"That's the best joke I've heard for a good while," cried Pendleton, slapping his leg with delight. "I'll go into that game at once. I'm going to give an informal little dinner at the Spotswood in town to-night. I want you and Preston to come. I'll warn you in advance, Clifford, I'm going to put up a strong game to win some of those pants."

"I'll bet you two pairs of boots I come out ahead," retorted Clifford promptly.

"Done!" replied Pendleton gayly; "and I'll invite Major Colbert and let him have a chance to get back his month's pay. Poor major!"

"All right, Pen, we'll be on hand at six o'clock, but we'll have to leave you now, as I see Miss Brent and Miss Price over by the doctor's tent. Sorry you can't come with us Pen, my boy."

"Never mind, you may be in the same box some day, Clifford, and then I'll have the laugh on you."

"All right, sonny! Good-by for the present."

"Good-by. If you see Cecil Granger ask him to join us to-night, will you, Clifford?"

"I will — and how about Captain Dalany?" asked Clifford.

"Oh, I'm not going to invite him, Cliff. He's not in our set!"

"I know that, but I thought the army was a kind of a leveler and you might want to take him in."

"No, the captain 's all right in his place; he knows the military drill, but I don't think we should be too free in letting down the bars, Cliff, so I think I won't include him. Good afternoon, boys. I 'm glad to have had this little chat, it enlivens this dull sentry duty; but I won't keep you from the ladies."

"That 's kind of you, Pen; we 'll say a good word for you and tell them what a fine soldier you 're making." And the two young men walked off in the direction of a group that had gathered in front of the doctor's tent.

Young Pendleton was left to his duty and his cigar. "It 's a confounded bore, but I suppose it 's one of the necessities of war," he said, with a sigh of resignation, as he solaced himself with the fragrant Havana. Suddenly he threw the cigar away and lifted his hat with a great show of courtliness.

"Miss Bowie," he exclaimed, "this is indeed a most delightful surprise!"

"Why, Mr. Pendleton, I am the one to be surprised. As I came along I saw a grand looking soldier standing here. I had no idea he was going to turn out to be an old friend — and you are a friend in need, too;" and she smiled at him bewitchingly from under a dainty parasol.

She wore a pretty summer gown of figured

muslin with a bit of cherry-colored ribbon at her throat. Her bonnet, a coquettish creation of the prevailing mode, had a dash of the same color in it.

"I shall be only too happy to render you any service in my power, Miss Bowie," replied Pendleton.

"Then tell me where are Colonel Clayborne's headquarters."

"These are his headquarters, Miss Bowie."

"Oh, are they? How very nice and comfortable; and how very swell you all are. I don't wonder the girls have all been wild to come out here, Mr. Pendleton, or should I say Captain Pendleton? — Perhaps Major — I don't know your rank."

"I 'm not an officer, Miss Bowie — not yet. I 'm only a trooper."

"Oh, a trooper, Mr. Pendleton. A dashing cavalier with a sword at his side, a jingling pair of spurs, long mustachios, and above all a heart for the ladies. How glorious to be a trooper! I should love to be a trooper. But where are your mustachios, Mr. Pendleton?"

"What I lack in mustache I make up in heart, as you know full well; but I fear you could never be a trooper, my dear Miss Regina, if it requires a heart to be such."

"What you lack in mustache you make up in impudence, you mean to say, Mr. Pendleton, if you accuse me of knowing anything about your heart."

"You should know, for it is in your keeping."

"In my keeping — since when, pray?"

"Since the very first moment I looked into your pretty eyes, Miss Bowie."

"Oh Lord, Mr. Pendleton, then it is such a small one that I must have mislaid it. I will look among my effects, and if I find the poor thing I will return it to you at once."

"You will probably find it, along with a dozen or two others, put away upon a shelf."

"It will be dreadfully dusty then, for I assure you I know nothing about the hearts of you men, never having seen them. And now will you be so very obliging as to show me into Colonel Clayborne's office?"

"I am sorry I cannot do that, as I have been instructed to allow no one to pass."

"Oh, I pray just let *me* pass."

"It is impossible for two reasons. First, I must not disobey orders; second, I could not reconcile myself to losing your charming society."

"Thank you for the compliment, Mr. Pendleton," she replied with a graceful curtsy; "but I should appreciate it more if you would only be agreeable and let me enter this mysterious sanctum which you are guarding so jealously."

"Impossible."

"*Please* let me go by," she pleaded in her most persuasive tone.

"I really can't unless you give the countersign," he replied, putting his sabre across the gateway and smiling in a tantalizing manner.

"Perhaps you think I don't know the countersign," she said archly.

"I am positive you do not;" "because," he added to himself, "there is n't any."

"Well, I do know it."

"What is it?"

"It was given to me in confidence; do you think I would betray it?"

"I think you would, in order to get in here."

"Oh, fie, Mr. Pendleton. Now, I 'll never tell you — unless I whisper it very softly."

"I 'm all attention."

"If it 's the right one, will you promise to let me go by?"

"Certainly."

"Well, come here and bend your head down, you stiff-necked grenadier."

"Now" — when her lips were close to his ear she drew back suddenly and gave it a sharp tap with her gloved hand, while with a merry laugh she slipped by him and up the steps — "you 're a fine soldier not to be able to keep a girl out," she cried gayly. "Never mind, don't disturb yourself, I can find the colonel, and above all don't forget the countersign;" and with a sprightly wave of the hand she disappeared into the house, closing the door quickly.

From a room at the farther end of the hall Colonel Clayborne heard the front door slam. "What is that?" he exclaimed in a tone of annoyance, rising from his chair. "I left particular

word that we were to be disturbed on no account. My men are splendid fellows, General, but they are frightfully disobedient. It is about time to make an example of some one."

A light step was heard in the hallway, and Miss Regina Bowie stood demurely on the threshold.

"I beg your pardon, Colonel Clayborne," she said sweetly. "I know this is wholly unmilitary. What do you do to intruders like me?"

"Miss Bowie can never intrude where she is always welcome," said the colonel politely, bending over her hand. "Allow me to present General Beauregard. Miss Bowie is the daughter of my old friend, General Bowie."

"I am highly honored in making the acquaintance of so charming a daughter of so gallant a soldier," said General Beauregard, bowing with effusion.

"The ladies," said the colonel, "have vied with the men in their patriotism; and now that we are about to take the field, they grace our camp daily, stimulating the soldiers by their beauty and their enthusiasm."

"Gad, Colonel, if there are many like Miss Bowie I advise you to get your men into the field at once, or you will have your hospitals full of those who have fallen under the batteries of these bright eyes."

"Oh, please, General Beauregard, you flatter us. I am afraid the men are far too much taken up with their new uniforms and in studying the

art of war to bestow many looks upon us poor girls. Woman can play but a minor part in time of war, General; but such as it is, she should do her part uncomplainingly and earnestly." She had begun the sentence in a merry mood, but the last words were spoken with deep seriousness.

"Miss Bowie is a host in herself, I assure you, General," said the colonel.

General Beauregard looked at her admiringly. "I could swear to that," he replied.

"I am so anxious to be of some service," the young woman said with intensity. "I know I can do something; that is why I came to ask the favor of a very short interview with you, General Beauregard. You will grant it, won't you? It is of so much importance, and I am so lucky in finding you here; and you, Colonel, and you, Major Colbert, will pardon me, I am sure, for interrupting you in this rude manner." She turned from one to the other with a radiant smile.

"Certainly, certainly," exclaimed all the warriors, speaking at once.

"Will you be so good as to step in here, Miss Bowie?" and the general led the way into an adjoining room. "In what way can I be of service to you, my dear young lady?" he asked, placing a chair for her.

Miss Bowie did not speak at once, but looked carefully into the general's face as he sat opposite her in an attitude of attention.

There was an expression of seriousness in her

wondrous eyes, and she hesitated to begin a subject which she was nevertheless determined to approach.

"What I am about to say," she finally began, "is of so delicate a nature, of so confidential a nature, that I must ask you to keep it a deep secret."

"Madam," replied the general, placing his hand upon his heart, "you may rest assured that any confidence from a lady is a sacred trust."

"What I am about to suggest, for it is a suggestion as well as an entreaty, may seem to you difficult to accomplish. It will certainly surprise you, but I hope you will hear all I have to say before you pass judgment upon it."

"I will listen willingly to everything you have to say."

She leaned her head slightly towards him, and began speaking in a low tone of voice, the color coming to her cheek, the fire flashing in her eyes as she progressed. Yet she never raised her voice, but went on speaking rapidly, clearly, convincingly.

General Beauregard looked at her with surprise and wonder, which increased as she continued. Once or twice he essayed to speak, but she imposed silence by lifting her hand. When she had finished and sat with her serious eyes looking earnestly into his face, awaiting his reply, he arose and took both of her hands in his own. "Miss Bowie, I honor you. You are a credit to your sex.

You are an honor to the South. I am proud to have this privilege, madam," and he saluted her hand in courtly manner.

"And your answer, General?" she asked, with just the slightest tremor of excitement in her quiet voice.

"Miss Bowie," he replied, walking up and down the room with a quick, energetic stride, "this is a matter which requires the greatest amount of discussion and planning. Can you not come to my headquarters?"

"I shall be only too happy to come, but it is so difficult to get access to you military commanders — one has to pass so many sentries, and storm so many redoubts," she replied, laughing.

"Never fear, you will find no difficulty of access. Shall I expect you — say day after to-morrow?"

"I shall certainly be there, and I thank you, General Beauregard, from the bottom of my heart for the generous way in which you have met my request. I was so afraid you would dismiss it lightly with a laugh."

"You presented the matter in too earnest a manner to permit it to be lightly treated, even if it should not have met with my approval," replied the general, as they rejoined the other officers.

"Nevertheless, I quaked inwardly," Regina answered, "and I thank you a thousand times. And I thank you also, most warmly, Colonel Clayborne, for not turning me out when I descended upon you so unexpectedly. You must consider a persistent

female like me a great nuisance sometimes. Now don't you, Colonel?" she asked, with a merry laugh.

"Never, Miss Bowie. You enthusiastic women are never in the way; you are an inspiration and a sustaining influence. We are going to have a battalion drill this afternoon, for General Beauregard's benefit. Won't you stay and witness it?"

"Oh, I shall be delighted to stay, and I want to see Clifford. Where is he?"

"Oh, Clifford 's a mighty soldier now. We shall doubtless find him deep in some book of army tactics. Come, and I will show you through the camp."

Regina Bowie bowed sweetly to young Pendleton as she walked away between General Beauregard and Colonel Clayborne. Her heart beat high with the elation of success. She was to have another interview with General Beauregard, and she felt confident that her cherished plan, her daring and elaborate scheme, was now assured of meeting with his final approval.

The battalion drill went off with éclat. Regina Bowie was radiant with enthusiasm. General Beauregard was greatly pleased. "All your men need now, Colonel, is a little of the hardship of war to make real soldiers of them."

A few days later the camp was thrown into a fever of excitement. Word had been received that the troop was to proceed towards the front.

Towards the front they went, although not into

immediate battle, as young Pendleton predicted and Clifford Clayborne hoped. There followed weeks of marching and bivouac; there were scouting and reconnoissance. Colonel Clayborne knew his men and knew what he could get out of them. By degrees, through force of example and through mutual affection, he established a dominion over them of which they themselves were hardly aware. He led them into dangers which he shared with them. He made them do picket duty until they grumbled and swore, and he cheerfully doubled their work.

Soon they joined a larger force of men, and this force in turn welded into another brigade, until they found themselves part of Beauregard's army. Rumors of approaching battle began to fly, at first vague and conflicting, changing from day to day. "They were to capture Washington!" "They were to intrench to repel an invading horde of one hundred thousand!" Still they went forward. That suited "Clayborne's troopers." Intrenching was not to their taste. What they wanted was a fair fight and no favors. They had had three months of the camp, the drill, and the march, and they had not yet met the enemy. They had begun to doubt his existence. "This is not war," said young Pendleton contemptuously; "this is merely a triumphal progress. I don't believe there's a man to oppose us between here and the Yankee capital!"

At last, when Pendleton's impatience was at

fever heat and when Clifford Clayborne had begun to despair of ever winning his spurs, *it* came.

One morning at daybreak, the troopers found themselves drawn up on the edge of a wood behind the crest of a low hill, the booming of cannon and the rattle of musketry sounding in their ears. On their left lay a long gray line of reserves, half hidden among the trees. Horses pranced with excitement, their riders' eyes shone with eagerness. Colonel Clayborne sat motionless upon his horse, coolly surveying his troopers. A shell came screaming over their heads to explode among the trees in the rear. Still the colonel gave no word of command. There was a subdued murmur among his men. Young Pendleton rode his spirited charger out of the ranks, and, saluting his colonel, called out in a loud voice that was heard by the entire regiment: "For the Lord's sake, Colonel Clayborne, are n't you going to give the word to charge?"

"Get back into the ranks!" thundered the colonel, turning upon him in fury.

"But, Colonel," reasoned Pendleton, almost in tears, "we came out to fight, and we 're missing all the fun."

"I'll give you all the fun you want, if you don't obey my orders," answered the colonel, drawing a revolver from his belt. "Get back to your place, or I 'll shoot you down!"

Pendleton bowed haughtily and rode slowly back. "It 's damn discourteous of the colonel,"

he muttered to Clifford, as he resumed his place in the ranks.

"The old man knows what he is about," replied Clifford, in duty bound to support his father's judgment; "but I wish he would give us the word," he could not help adding.

An orderly rode up to Colonel Clayborne. The latter's whole demeanor changed. A few quick words of command and the troop was in motion, their commander, not one whit less impatient than his men, in the lead. Over the crest of the hill they swept, and in the valley at their feet the battle was in full view.

Down the slope they thundered, their faces set sternly, and their eyes fixed straight before them. Intoxicated with excitement, rendered wild with a new-born frenzy to kill, they rode like the tempest down upon their foe.

Another shell whistled over their heads. "Hurrah!" cried Clifford Clayborne. "This is war!"

"They are shooting too high," called out Pendleton gayly, at his side.

A blinding flash, a roar like an earthquake, and Clifford gasped for breath. "That shell struck!" yelled the voice of a corporal in his ear.

Uninjured, Clifford looked about him. Young Pendleton's riderless horse was running at his side. Clifford set his teeth, and with the Clayborne troop rushed forward to win his spurs.

CHAPTER IV

REGINA'S TOAST

THIS is not to be a chronicle of battles. He who wishes for graphic details of the great combats must turn to the pages of history.

There he can read of each encounter in the terrible struggle. He can follow the fortunes of noble armies sent forth to melt away in the devouring flame of conflict. There he can see the blood-drenched fields, hear the cries of the wounded, the groans of the dying, and count the thousands upon thousands of those who fall from the ranks of the strongest, the bravest, and finest of the land, until his heart grows sick and his brain wearies.

A year had passed since the Northern troops had fled from the field at Manassas. The men who had been through the Peninsular campaign and those who had fought the desperate battle of Shiloh no longer spoke of crushing the rebellion in sixty days.

Southerners who had tasted the mettle of the "Armies of the West," and who had seen the Yankees before the breastworks at Donelson, no longer called those Yankees "white-livered."

Both North and South had come to realize that the great conflict had only just begun.

The North, with half a million men in the field, was preparing to "fight it out." The South, defiant and determined, was entering into an unequal and hopeless contest with that magnificent courage which was to compel the admiration of the world.

Gordon Clayborne had made the choice between his native State and his country. The struggle had cost him dear, but having decided for the Union he fought for it with all the strength of his nature. The summer of '62 found Clayborne with Grant's army in the Mississippi Valley, where he commanded a company in a cavalry regiment.

No matter what the final outcome of the war, Gordon felt that he must be separated from his kindred for all time. During the months that had passed, some stray news of them had reached him from time to time. His father was colonel of a troop of Virginia Light Horse. Clifford was now a captain, and two cousins of the family were lieutenants. "Shoulder to shoulder the Claybornes fight" had been the watchword of the old colonel, and they had fought thus. Gordon heard of the "Clayborne Horse" at the battle of Manassas; how the colonel was twice wounded and how the impetuous Clifford had dashed alone into the Union lines, then finding himself in this dire peril, had wheeled his horse suddenly, cutting a wide circle, and had come safely off, while friend and foe cheered him for his daring.

Gordon's face was sad as he thought of his

father's wounds, and his heart grew warm at his brother's reckless courage. "Blood is thicker than water" is an old saw, but it runs true. Gordon smiled as he thought of Clifford on his black horse; and his father — did he still ride his gray charger? How familiar the picture was: the large gray horse upon whose back Gordon himself had ridden not many months before. Not many months? The time could not be reckoned by months nor years. It belonged to a past age, a life that had no existence now, except in memory. Surely it is not unmanly for the moisture to come to Captain Gordon Clayborne's eyes. He brushes it away quickly and turns to the duty at hand; for Clayborne is to report with his company at headquarters within an hour.

It is a bright June morning. Three men are sitting in front of the general headquarters at Corinth. Two of them wear the stars of a major-general upon their shoulder straps the third is a staff officer. One of the general officers is tall and slender, with a light, sandy beard. His eyes have a brilliant, excitable expression, and he smokes in quick, nervous puffs. The other is short in stature, with closely trimmed beard about his strong, determined-looking chin. There are lines of care on his forehead and signs of worry in his steel blue eyes, yet he smokes serenely. He is dressed simply, almost meanly; with a coat of plain blue cloth such as a private soldier might wear. His

felt hat is tossed carelessly on the grass at his side.

Each of these three officers is sitting in that pleasant and restful position which a chair balanced upon two legs affords; and as they smoke their cigars they converse in a quiet tone.

"Sherman, my position here is becoming intolerable. I have petitioned the government at Washington to relieve me from duty under Halleck. I am going to insist that they assign me to another department."

"Grant, let me urge you most strongly not to take this step," replied Sherman quickly.

"I have taken it," rejoined General Grant quietly.

"You are making a serious mistake. As a friend, I assure you that you are about to injure yourself."

"I cannot help that. It is impossible for me to work without the confidence of my chief. General Halleck does not trust me. He hampers me in my work. He countermands my orders — I am practically relieved from command here. I might as well go elsewhere."

"My dear Grant," exclaimed General Sherman, laying his hand upon the other's arm, "you have the confidence of the nation. You, who have been so patient for so long, can surely wait a little longer."

"I am afraid that the nation is becoming impatient. I try not to hear all the stories that are

going the rounds; yet some of them will come to my ears and they cut deeply, Sherman."

"Was I not called everything under the sun from a traitor to a lunatic, for more than a year?" cried Sherman. "It was not until after Pittsburg Landing that I was treated even with decency, to say nothing of justice. If I bore that in silence, you can afford to ignore these petty calumnies; and you certainly ought to ignore them and remain with the army which trusts you and still looks to you to lead it to success."

Grant did not speak for several moments, then knocking off the ashes from his cigar, he replied slowly: —

"Perhaps you are right. I may have been hasty. I will withdraw my application."

"I am glad to hear you say that," was the hearty reply.

"Thank you, Sherman; I feel I can always get the soundest and most generous advice from you. I will withdraw my application, but I shall change my headquarters to Memphis for the present. I have already obtained Halleck's permission to do this."

"When are you going to make this change?"

"Right away. In an hour I shall be all ready to move, and I wish you would ride back with me. I want to talk to you."

"Very well. I 'll give a few orders to my chief of staff and rejoin you within an hour, General Grant," said Sherman, as he withdrew.

Grant nodded from behind his cigar.

As Sherman walked briskly away a civilian passed him with a cheerful salutation. This man came up to headquarters with the easy grace of one who feels quite at home wherever he may find himself. Benjamin Chesterfield was the correspondent of a St. Louis newspaper. He possessed the rare tact and judgment to send no news to his paper that would aid or instruct the enemy, therefore he found access to military circles which were sometimes barred to journalists of less discretion.

"Mr. Chesterfield," said Grant, as the former dropped into a chair, "I 'm going to change my headquarters to Memphis. Do you care to go with us?"

"Thank you, General, I will go with pleasure."

"I can't promise that you will find life there more exciting than here, but we shall be glad of your company."

"Much obliged. I 'll see about getting my things together."

"All right. See Bowers there about your accommodations, he will look out for you;" and General Grant lit a fresh cigar and lapsed into silence. The pleasant smile that had shone in his eyes as he spoke died quite away and a look of serious reflection took its place there. Thus he sat for nearly an hour, apparently oblivious to what was going on about him, quietly smoking and thinking.

It was a simple matter to obtain an interview

with General Grant. He surrounded himself with few barriers in the way of sentries or body-guards. At almost any time, a person wishing to see him upon business had only to approach him to be received affably. So it was not strange that a man dressed in prosperous looking broadcloth, well-fed, with a large expanse of vest and a heavy gold chain across it, should walk boldly up to where the general sat deep in thought.

"I should like to see General Grant, please," he said briskly.

"I am General Grant," was the quiet reply.

"Oh!" ejaculated the newcomer, looking at the general with curiosity and ill-concealed surprise. Then recovering himself quickly, "I am Mr. Thomas Bulger of New York. I have a letter of introduction to you, General," putting his hand into his pocket and drawing forth a number of papers. "Ah, here it is."

General Grant took the letter and read it.

"A pretty strong recommendation, as you see, General," the other went on pompously. "It is signed by three senators and five representatives."

"What do you want me to do for you, Mr. Bulger?"

"Well, sir, I represent a New York syndicate: men of means, you understand, General; and although they are keen men of business, they are liberal, open-minded gentlemen. They have placed a large sum of money in my hands, having great confidence in my business ability" —

"Well, what do you want me to do?" interrupted General Grant, with a slight note of impatience in his voice.

"In short, General, the syndicate thought if you would give me a permit to buy cotton from the Southerners — one which would allow me to go and come through your lines with some freedom" —

Grant thrust the letter of introduction back into the man's hand.

"You take this letter, Mr. Bulger, and go!" he said sternly.

"What!" ejaculated Mr. Bulger in astonishment.

"I have nothing further to say to you."

"Won't you listen to what I have to propose," cried Bulger. "Why, do you know, General Grant, that cotton is one dollar a pound in New York? One dollar a pound, sir! Just think of that!" The speculator's eyes glistened greedily.

Grant looked at him with disgust.

"Now, General," the man went on insinuatingly, "I stand prepared to offer you twenty-five thousand dollars 'freight rate' just to load one of your empty supply trains with cotton and run it up to the Mississippi River. Now, General, these cars are going back empty; what harm" —

"Leave these headquarters instantly!" interrupted the general sharply.

Mr. Bulger's face turned purple. He thrust the letter back into his breast pocket.

"Well, General Grant," he said in a voice trembling with rage, "permit me to remark that you show scant courtesy to the gentlemen who introduce me."

Grant rose from his seat. "If I find you anywhere about the army after to-day, Mr. Bulger," he said quietly, "I'll have you arrested. Men like you," he continued with withering scorn, "do more to corrupt the army than any other class. You traders care more for a bale of cotton than you do for the whole nation. Any man who presents such a petition to me in future will be clapped into jail; no matter if he comes down here with the indorsement of every member of both houses of Congress. Now I think I've made it clear to you how I view this trading with the enemy. You can circulate my views pretty freely among your fraternity. Good-day, sir."

Mr. Bulger beat a hurried retreat, muttering as he went, "I'll tell everybody in Washington that I found General Grant utterly incompetent through the use of liquor."

"You rather knocked him over, General," said Bowers, with a laugh.

"Perhaps I was a little severe, Bowers. There are a few things that make me mad, and that's one of them. The men who are doing the fighting don't like to be asked to protect a trade which helps support their enemies, and the profits of which go to the men who save their skins at home. If the Treasury Department sees fit to give these

permits, I suppose I can't stop them, but if any fellow comes to me with such a request he 'll find out that he 's barking up the wrong tree." The general's mild eye kindled and he chewed his cigar; then rising from his chair, he said: —

"Here 's Sherman; he is always on time to the minute. Now if the escort is ready, Bowers, and Rawlins and the rest of the boys are on hand, we 'll start."

"The escort is waiting at the rear of the house, sir, and here are Rawlins and the others."

General Grant sprang upon the back of his favorite cream-colored horse, leaning forward for a moment to stroke the animal's neck affectionately. "What men are those, Rawlins," he asked, as they trotted out of the gate.

"Company D, 1st Regiment of Cavalry, General Thomas's division. It is the crack company of the regiment; fine-looking men, don't you think so, General?"

"Yes, and they are splendidly mounted; but tell the captain to send half his men back to their quarters. We do not need so many to escort us to Memphis."

"General Grant, I don't think it safe. I think you ought to have twice as many, rather than fewer men for a ride of ninety miles."

"Oh, I guess it 's safe enough. We have the country pretty well cleared, and I hardly think there are rebels in any force between here and Memphis."

"I don't think a general officer ought to run the risk of getting captured," remarked Rawlins.

"Have it as you wish, Rawlins, but there is not much risk. Besides, if I were to be captured, Halleck could easily make another general," he added, with a quiet laugh.

The cavalcade traveled for several hours steadily. Grant rode with Rawlins on one side and General Sherman on the other. Behind them came Bowers and the other members of the staff; with them was the correspondent Chesterfield. His laugh was contagious, and between him and Bowers, with his flow of spirits, the party was kept in a continual state of jollity. Bringing up the rear was Captain Clayborne with a company of the best mounted men of the regiment.

General Grant rode for the most part in silence, only occasionally asking a question of Sherman, or speaking to the dark-haired Rawlins in a tone of familiarity. But if he talked little, he was a good listener, and frequently by a nod or a gesture showed his approval of some remark made by the brilliant Sherman.

It was past the noon hour when, dusty from their long ride and parched with thirst, they drew up in the shade of some trees before a large hospitable-looking house with cool, inviting veranda.

"This looks like a good place," said General Grant. "What do you think, Sherman; can we do better than this?"

"I think we should be justified in trespassing to

the extent of taking a rest on this front porch, and having some refreshment," laughed Sherman, "though I doubt if we shall be very welcome."

"Let the men dismount and take their rations under these trees, Rawlins, and tell their commander I shall hold him responsible for any depredations, no matter how slight."

The generals with their staff officers stepped on to the piazza. A white-bearded, patriarchal gentleman stood in the doorway. Rawlins addressed him politely: —

"Sir, we are going to take the liberty of refreshing ourselves in your house; but you need have no apprehension about the safety of your property. Nothing will be disturbed."

The old gentleman came forward slowly.

"Whom have I the honor of entertaining?" he asked with quiet dignity.

"Generals Grant, Sherman, and staff."

"General Grant, I must inform you that I owe allegiance to the Southern Confederacy. I am a non-combatant because I am too old to bear arms. I have two sons in the service, fighting the enemies of our country. I have no reason to love the uniform you wear, but sirs, Henry Robertson can refuse no man hospitality under his roof as long as it is left to him; such as I have I will offer you freely."

There was a quaint stateliness in his manner and a simple dignity in his speech which inspired courtesy.

General Grant took the old gentleman by the hand, saying in his clear voice: "Mr. Robertson, I respect the frank avowal of your opinions. We shall try not to inconvenience you more than is absolutely necessary."

The party sat down in the shade of the veranda. The venerable Mr. Robertson dispatched one servant to order a luncheon to be prepared, while a grinning colored boy brought forth a tray of cooling drinks, and dispensed them among the thirsty officers.

"I am afraid, gentlemen, that the repast I can offer you will be somewhat meagre," said Mr. Robertson in a serious tone. "Last week a party of marauding soldiers from the camp at Memphis descended upon my hen-house, and despoiled me of the major part of my stock."

"Sherman, those were some of your 'vandals,'" laughed Grant. "Mr. Robertson, make out an inventory of the loss, and give it to General Sherman. I will see that he repays you."

"Very good, sir, I will do so," replied the old gentleman, bowing gravely.

Grant, who was sitting on the edge of the piazza with his back against one of its pillars, took a pad from his pocket, and wrote a few lines, signing them with his name. This paper he handed to Mr. Robertson, and looked at Sherman with a twinkle in his eye, as he said: "If any more of 'the enemy' come this way to annoy you, show them that, Mr. Robertson. It will protect your property."

"I thank you, sir," replied the septuagenarian, putting the paper carefully away. Then, rising from his chair: "Will you do me the honor of coming into the dining-room, as luncheon is about to be served?"

With all the bearing of an old nobleman Mr. Robertson conducted his guests to the dining-room. Two young ladies were standing by the window; they appeared undecided whether to run away in fear at the approach of the party of gentlemen or to stay and satisfy the curiosity which was consuming them. The latter motive proved the stronger, and they remained.

A slight shade of annoyance passed over the face of Mr. Robertson, and there was a note of surprise in his voice, as he said: "I did not anticipate, my dear young ladies, that you would give us the honor of your presence." Then, turning to the Federal officers, he went through the ceremony of introduction in his most polished and courteous manner.

One of the young women, Mr. Robertson's daughter, the child of his old age, a slender girl of eighteen, hardly looked at the gentlemen, but seemed more than half inclined to regret her temerity and to abandon the field with her curiosity only half satisfied. But the other, who had been presented as Miss Bowie from Virginia and a visitor in the Robertson mansion, held her ground bravely. She seemed to enjoy the situation, and by her own self-possession somewhat reassured her more timid companion.

"Knowing that some Federal officers had honored us by staying to luncheon, Dora and I did not at first intend to come down," said the elder one, with a curl of the lip, "but we were dying with curiosity to see General Sherman's horns."

"I do not quite understand you," said Mr. Robertson.

"Why, we have always been told that General Sherman had horns," replied Miss Bowie naïvely, "and that General Grant was a bloodthirsty monster."

"My dear Regina, remember that these gentlemen, although enemies, are guests under my roof, and therefore are entitled to our respectful consideration," said Mr. Robertson in a tone of mild reproval.

"I assure you, Mr. Robertson, I have always been told just what I have said about the Yankee generals. And you, yourself, said only yesterday that you hoped General Bragg would soon put a quietus on those two Yankee commanders, Grant and Sherman."

"I do trust sincerely that our arms will be victorious, and that when Bragg meets our enemies on the field of battle, the right will triumph; but we must not forget our duty to those who come to us with the sword sheathed to crave our hospitality."

"We Northerners are not the bloodthirsty monsters Miss Bowie has pictured us," laughed Sherman. "We will try to convince her of our amiability if she will honor us by remaining."

"Dora and I will stay, General Sherman, although I am sorry that you have no horns, because I would have you look just as bad as I think you are," and her eyes flashed defiantly at him.

"And I would have you think just as well of me as you can," retorted Sherman facetiously.

"Then drink this toast," she exclaimed, raising a glass of wine, "'To the heroes of the South: may victory be theirs!' Drink that toast, and I 'll think a heap better of you."

"I will substitute another for that: 'To the fair women of the South,'" rejoined Sherman gallantly.

"No," declared Regina emphatically, "you must drink to the brave men first."

"If I do, will you drink to the health of the Northern armies?" continued Sherman in a tone of banter.

"I 'll make no bargains with you. Are you afraid to drink? I would not have it said that I refused to drink a toast to brave men."

"How will this toast do, Miss Bowie? 'To the brave men of both armies?'" asked General Sherman, raising his glass.

She hesitated a moment with a pout upon her pretty lips. Then her face cleared as she replied smilingly: "Very well, General Sherman, as we have more brave men on our side I can consider it as honoring us the most."

Sherman laughed heartily. "Construe it any way you have a mind to."

"Gentlemen, General Sherman has proposed a toast," called Regina Bowie, looking about the board with her fearless eyes. "General Grant, some wine?"

"No, thank you, Miss Bowie."

"What, you won't even drink that toast," exclaimed Miss Regina reproachfully. "But perhaps you don't care for this wine. Let me fill your glass with some of this Kentucky Bourbon. Surely, General Grant, you can't refuse to drink a toast proposed by one of your own party," she said artlessly.

Rawlins began to move uneasily in his chair, and darted an angry look at the ingenuous young woman.

"There, General Grant," continued Miss Bowie, filling his glass to the brim with some old Kentucky whiskey. "I might have known that such a fire-eater as you would abjure weak claret. This is more suitable for warriors."

With a sudden movement of his elbow Grant's chief of staff sent the glass of whiskey spinning to the floor. Miss Bowie gave a cry of dismay.

"I beg pardon for my clumsiness," said Rawlins. "I hope your dress is not injured."

"It is of no account if it is spoiled," she replied, "but you 've spoiled a good glass of whiskey, General Rawlins," and she looked into his face saucily, while his dark eyes snapped back at her. The imperturbable Grant took no notice of the incident. "This will suit the matter in hand,

Miss Bowie," he said significantly, taking up a glass of water: "God gave us Lincoln and Liberty. Let us fight for both," and he drank the toast without another word. Regina looked at the general curiously; then rising from the table she said with a calm dignity, "I 'll leave you gentlemen to your cigars." She could not refrain from giving Rawlins a half-defiant look as she passed him; and throwing a coquettish glance at General Sherman, walked slowly from the room, through the hall and out into the garden. Once in the garden she ran down the walk in high spirits, laughing to herself as she ran. She did not stop until she reached a grove of pine-trees at a little distance from the house. Through the shrubbery on her left she could see the Federal soldiers lying at ease under the shade trees, and the Union generals who had come out upon the veranda to smoke. She clinched her hand and shook it in the direction of the Yankees. Then with an expectant light in her bright eyes she turned and looked down the road at her right.

Long and earnestly she peered down the road, which lay white and hot in the afternoon sun. As far as her eye could reach, over a gentle, sloping hill and across a piece of level until it disappeared into a bit of woodland beyond, the road showed no sign of human life. From time to time Regina would turn her eyes in the direction of the house, to assure herself that the Yankees were still there. Then with impatience she would twist her head in the opposite direction.

"It is nearly two hours since I sent word to our friends by a swift messenger," she murmured impatiently. "Oh, do not fail me, Jackson, do not fail me, as I have not failed you." Then she flew back to the house. In the library she found quiet and soft-eyed Dora Robertson, where she had retired as soon as the dominating Regina had released her from the table.

"Oh, Dora," cried Regina, throwing her arms about the young girl, "I am so excited."

"I should think you would be after having gone into the dining-room where all those Yankee soldiers were. I wonder how I had the courage to follow you."

"Pooh, it is not that — they would n't hurt us. But just think," she went on, whispering in Dora's ear, "two of the biggest Yankee chiefs, Grant and Sherman, are here together under this roof, with such a small escort. What if a force of our men should ride up just by chance? Did you know Dora, that this morning there was a battalion of our cavalry not many miles away? It may be nearer by this time," and she walked to the window and looked out through the half-closed blinds.

A young Federal officer, who, together with Benjamin Chesterfield and a few of the younger staff officers, had eaten lunch upon the large veranda, strolled across the lawn. He paused under the trees, where his men lay resting, and spoke to a sub-lieutenant. Then passing on he approached the house, as if intending to saunter around the building.

From her coign of vantage, screened by the window-shutter, Regina could see him as he drew near. Without being seen by him she could note his appearance. She saw that his uniform, although dusty and somewhat worn, set off a shapely figure, and that he was well-favored. Regina had a keen eye for manly beauty, and looked again with more interest; then she saw that the sun-browned and war-stained Federal officer was Gordon Clayborne. He came so near to her that she could smell the smoke from his cigar, yet he would have passed by unheeding, had she so desired. For a moment in her first surprise, she had thought of drawing back into the room, but dominated by a strong impulse she felt that she could not let him go, and therefore spoke his name.

He looked up quickly in the direction whence the sound came, but could see no one.

"Gordon!" she repeated, "enter the house by the rear door and come into the room on the right-hand side of the hall. I am there, in the library."

He still could not see the speaker, but he knew the voice.

"Regina!" he began, but the blinds closed tightly, and, electrified with amazement, he did as she had bidden him.

As he entered the library the slight figure of a girl pushed past him, but he did not notice her.

"Regina!" he cried, "What marvel is this? I am so taken by surprise I cannot believe it is you."

"This is a world of surprises, my dear Gordon. Is it more strange for you to find me here at a friend's house than that I should ever see you in that uniform and with those men?"

She stood before him with great self-composure. She spoke in the low sweet voice habitual to her, yet while she smiled at him there was a bitter note of contempt on the words "that uniform" and "those men."

Gordon looked at her without speaking. Except that she was now less the girl and more the woman, she had changed little since he had last seen her. She was one of those who are not easily embarrassed or made ill at ease. Consciousness of her own strength of will, and a belief in herself and her powers gave her a self-poise that rarely forsook her.

"Gordon," she said at length, "you left home without saying good-by to me. Why did you?"

Her wonderful eyes met his. He answered her with frankness. "I left you without saying good-by, Regina, because I was afraid to see you again."

"Afraid of me, Gordon?" she echoed softly.

"Afraid that you might be able to dissuade me from a course of action upon which I was determined."

"Then I had some influence over you, Gordon," she said.

"Great influence — Regina."

"And yet I could not keep you. While your brother Clifford" —

"Tell me about Clifford!" he exclaimed eagerly. "How is he? Where is he? And my father — When did you see them last? I have not heard of them for months."

"Your father is ill" —

"Wounded?" interrupted Gordon anxiously.

"No, he has had the fever, but he will recover. He is now back in Richmond."

"And Clifford?"

"Nothing seems to injure Clifford. Bullets seem to pass him by, disease ignores him. He is always the same cheerful, undaunted spirit."

Then she looked into his face with a triumphant expression in her brilliant eyes. "I can do more than sit at home, Gordon, picking lint for the soldiers or sewing shirts. That is splendid woman's work and there are lots of good women to do it. But I found I could do more — I have done more."

"What have you done, Regina?"

"Much that many men could not have done," she answered significantly.

At that moment there were sounds of excited commotion at the front of the house.

Gordon stepped suddenly to the window and pushed open the blinds. Regina's head was at his shoulder. Winding out of the woods about a mile distant rode a troop of horse.

"That is one thing which I have done, Gordon Clayborne. Through me the two most infamous Yankee generals will be taken prisoners. Is not

that something for a woman to do?" The flush of success was upon her cheek; her dark eyes flashed with elation, and there was a ring of exultation in her voice.

Quick in action, Gordon sprang through the window and was among his men in an instant, giving orders in rapid succession. The generals with their staffs were already in the saddle. Grant looked quietly at the approaching horsemen. "There 's a battalion of those fellows," he said. "I doubt if they can overtake us, for our horses are fresher; but we had better not linger, Sherman, if you are all ready," and the party galloped off down the road. Rawlins stayed behind for a moment. "As soon as your men are mounted, Captain Clayborne, follow us and protect our rear. You may all be killed or captured, but keep them from capturing General Grant at all hazards."

"Yes, sir," shouted Clayborne as his men leaped into their saddles. Then instead of retreating he drew them up in line across the road. A slight rise of ground in front of them hid the approaching enemy, but by the sound of their horses' hoofs Gordon knew they would be upon them in a few moments. "Men," he said in his decisive way, "when the enemy's nose appears above that knoll charge him. We may surprise and disconcert him for a time. Then turn and make off down the road. Those who are not hurt will probably get away, for the enemy's horses must be tired."

Regina Bowie, who during these preparations had stood counting the seconds, now ran to Gordon's side.

"Gordon, what are you going to do?"

"Hold those fellows in check for a few moments."

"You will all be killed or captured. Surrender to them. You need have no fear, Gordon; I will see that you come off free."

Gordon had no time to answer.

Vaulting into the saddle he spoke to his men. "Advance to that cover of pine-trees. When I give the word spring forward out of the ambush like so many fiends."

"Gordon, you are mad to fight against fate like this. You are fairly beaten. I do not want to see you killed before my eyes. Will you not yield?" She spoke beseechingly, looking up into his face.

At any other time her earnestness and solicitude would have greatly moved him, but in the excitement of the moment he scarcely heard her.

"In Heaven's name, Regina, go into the house. This is no place for you."

With a cry of exasperation, she sprang forward. "Then if you won't surrender I will warn them that you are in ambush here."

Before she had gone a rod Gordon had ridden to her side, and leaning from the saddle caught her by the arm. Leading her to the side of the road he held her there.

She made no further resistance, but looking up into his face said quietly: —

"Remember I tried to save you, Gordon, and if I had gotten to them I should have asked that they spare *you*."

Gordon let go her arm and pushed her on to the bank away from the road. "For God's sake, Regina, retire, or you may get hurt."

"Forward, men!" he cried in the next breath, and at his command the little band rode straight into the teeth of the advancing foe. It was a sudden charge, a shock, a whirl and a retreat, with a running fight along the road. A fierce, hot fight, where many a trooper on both sides left an empty saddle. Then as Captain Clayborne had foretold, the Union soldiers — what were left of them — forged ahead on their fresh horses, while the Confederates followed closely, firing after their retreating foes.

Regina watched the flight and pursuit from an upper window of the house.

"I pray the Lord that they do capture old Grant," she murmured. "Oh, they *must* take him!"

At nightfall, gray-coated, dust-begrimed troopers walked their horses painfully back to the Robertson mansion. Regina stood anxiously upon the veranda to receive them.

"Oh, Captain Moffett," she cried in consternation, "have you let them escape?"

"They got away without our letting them, Miss

Bowie. Some of our men, having better horses, are still on the chase, but we others just had to give up. Our animals are dead beat out."

"Do you think there is any hope of their catching Grant?"

"They 'll chase him clear into Memphis if they don't. I tell you, Miss Bowie, those Yankees are good ones to run, but we dropped a good sight of 'em."

"Well, do you think there is any hope of our men overtaking Grant?"

"Candidly, Miss Bowie, I don't think there is any prospect of our men catching old Grant this side of h—, begging your pardon; but I think they 'll find him there some day."

CHAPTER V

A HOT RIDE AFTER GRANT

Benjamin Chesterfield, the non-combatant, with a smoking revolver in his hand, rode in the rear rank by the side of Gordon Clayborne. "I 'm not much of a fighter," he said apologetically between shots, "and strictly speaking I do not suppose I am entitled to take a hand in this scrimmage; but in an emergency like this it does not do to stand upon technicalities. If my big carcass can stop a bullet which might reach the general, why, it 's my duty to interpose it."

It was a hot ride they had with the bullets singing in the air behind them. Their revolvers once emptied, they made no attempt to reload, but bent all their energies towards widening the distance between them and the pursuing cavalry. Chesterfield's big carcass did not stop a bullet, but the horse he bestrode gave a quick snort, plunged, wavered, and fell to its knees, to roll over and expire by the roadside. The newspaper man disentangled his feet from the stirrups and waved his hand to Clayborne. "Good-by, I guess I 'll have to stay with the 'rebs'!" he shouted.

By Gordon's side galloped a horse whose sad-

dle had been emptied by the last volley. Gordon caught the rein, and pulling up, galloped rapidly back to the discomfited correspondent.

"Here 's another horse," he said, throwing the bridle into Chesterfield's hand. "Jump into the saddle." The non-combatant followed the advice with surprising agility for one of his size. Then the two men dashed away together and succeeded in making good their retreat, but the call was close and Gordon Clayborne had received a bullet in the arm.

"You got me out of a tight squeeze, Clayborne," said Chesterfield tersely. "I shan't forget it."

Gordon's act had been done on the spur of the moment. It was one of many thousand similar deeds which warfare brings forth. He hardly gave it a second thought, yet the deed itself cemented a life friendship.

General Grant and his party rode at the top of their speed for some time.

"Those fellows are making us run for it, Grant," laughed Sherman. "I guess you 're sorry you did n't take a larger escort."

Grant looked over his shoulder at their pursuers. "Our men are putting up a splendid fight," he said, "but I fear the rebels will capture them."

"Never mind, we ought to come across some of my outlying regiments, at any time now. The 'rebs' will run right into a trap, and we 'll bag the whole lot," rejoined the optimistic Sherman.

Although the pursuit was desperate and the Confederates spared neither horse nor rider, all their efforts to overtake the Union party were fruitless. The horses of the Federals, refreshed by their recent rest, gradually increased the distance between them and their pursuers, until finally the gray coats were no longer in view, and the sound of their horses' hoofs was not audible.

"Let us pull up a little," said General Grant. "I don't want to spoil this horse."

The party slackened its speed and Rawlins began to breathe more freely.

"Some one must have sent word to the enemy that we were resting at that man Robertson's house," mused General Grant after their horses had been reined up into a swinging lope.

"I 'll wager that battalion is a detachment from Jackson's cavalry," said Sherman. "I had no idea he was so near ; but it does beat all how rebel cavalry gets over the ground. You think you have those fellows surrounded in one part of the country and presto! they slip through your fingers and bob up in another place, miles away, grinning and ready for business."

"They are superb horsemen," said Grant, "and their leaders are men of intrepid courage and reckless daring. Such men as Forrest and Stuart and also that guerrilla chieftain, Morgan, are equal to many regiments of foot soldiers. They have no base of supplies to protect, but are at home wherever they go. The people all through their

States idolize them. They feed them with the best of their food, shelter and nurse them when they are sick or wounded. With a few handfuls of parched corn and a flask of whiskey in their pockets these Southern cavalry raiders can ride for days in the saddle. They do us incalculable damage. They destroy millions of dollars of our supplies and kill or capture our troops to the extent of many times their own number."

"You are right," acquiesced Sherman; "for every regiment I had working on the repairs to the Memphis Railroad I had to detail another regiment to guard its supplies; and even then Morgan's men carried off some of our cattle right under our very noses. And what do you think the rascal had the impudence to do? He sent me word that I must give my steers better fodder, for it was hardly worth his while to carry off such a poor skinny lot. We must learn to fight these fellows with their own weapons," and Sherman laughed jovially.

"I know of only one Union cavalry officer whom I would match against either Forrest or Stuart," said Grant.

"Who is that?" demanded Sherman with keen interest.

"He is that little Irish colonel, Philip Sheridan. You keep your eye on him, Sherman. Some day you 'll see him making the fur fly."

Half an hour later the little cavalcade struck the line of the Memphis Railroad where a regiment

of soldiers were hard at work laying track, constructing culverts, building trestles, and working away like beavers.

"I think we can feel pretty secure now," said Sherman, drawing in his horse to give him a breathing spell. "I've got six regiments strung out along the railroad between this point and the city. We've been cleaning out a tunnel which the rebels blew up for us."

Grant, who had dismounted and who was rubbing down the wet coat of his handsome horse, looked up from his work, to say emphatically: —

"I do not know a job, from the simple nailing of a horseshoe to a stupendous engineering work or the most intricate mathematical problem, that volunteers cannot be found in our ranks to do, and do well."

"And yet these are the armies which European tacticians sneeringly call 'armed mobs,'" commented Sherman.

"I have never called upon these 'armed mobs' for any extraordinary service and found them wanting," said Grant warmly, remounting and riding along among the men.

The two generals were at once recognized, and the soldiers flocked about them, cheering heartily. Grant, in particular, was the object of their attentions. The general bore the demonstration placidly, until a group of enthusiastic young fellows surrounded him and began to draw hairs from his horse's tail as souvenirs.

"Men, fall back!" he commanded sternly, and quickly urging his steed out of the circle, he cantered away, followed by Rawlins and the other members of his staff, who were laughing heartily at their chief's discomfiture.

"A few minutes more and those boys would not have left a hair in my horse's tail," declared Grant ruefully.

By this time Gordon Clayborne and his men had ridden up. They were covered with dust and blood, and showed signs of the hard knocks which they had received. "Here we are, Colonel Rawlins," cried Clayborne, saluting. "Ten of our number are in the hands of the Confederates or lying by the roadside, and those of us left are not very pretty to look at; but if you want any fighting done, I reckon you 'll find lots of it left in these fellows." The fire of excitement still burned in his eyes, and his voice rang clear and steady, though his right arm hung limp from the shoulder and there were signs of pain on his face.

About noon on the day following they arrived at Memphis. Gordon Clayborne's wound, which had been attended to hastily the night before, was more painful than he would admit, and he was not sorry when they reached the city. Here it was given further attention, and to his intense chagrin he was told by the hospital surgeon that it would be a fortnight before he could use his right arm.

Like all men of action, Gordon Clayborne chafed

under any restraint to bodily exercise, and he inquired daily of the surgeon, with great anxiety, how long it would be before he could report for active duty.

CHAPTER VI

MARJORIE WARE

Thus a week passed, and Gordon Clayborne, having ample time on his hands, amused himself as best he could, which was little enough, by riding about the city and out into the surrounding country. One sunny afternoon he rode out a little way from the city. He guided his horse with the reins in his left hand, for the right arm was still imprisoned in its sling.

The day was warm, and Gordon sought the grateful shade of some woods that grew invitingly by the roadside. He allowed his horse, with the rein on his neck, to walk at random under the pleasant shade, while the rider bared his head to the soft breezes, and drank in the sweet odor from the pine woods. It was one of those moments when the most hardened soldier, the most bloodthirsty fighter, could not fail to have his passions soothed by the soft influences of his surroundings. Gordon Clayborne, being neither hardened nor bloodthirsty, but a fine young fellow who had, if the truth be known, quite a tender heart beating under his coat, was in a meditative mood colored by some sadness. Suddenly he was awak-

ened from his musings by his horse. The animal stopped, and, putting his nose high in the air, gave utterance to a long, loud whinny. This call was answered by a similar sound near at hand, though somewhat less distinct.

Clayborne caught up the reins in his hand, while he looked intently toward the spot whence the sound came. There was a rustle among the bushes, followed by a patter as of footsteps upon the leaves. Very light footsteps they were, like those of some small animal scurrying away to avoid detection.

Captain Clayborne did not apprehend danger, but long experience develops caution. Quietly he dismounted, stepped behind a tree, and as silently as possible, from one tree to another, worked his way in a half circle until he could see behind the screen of bushes.

There is nothing in the appearance of a clean-limbed little Kentucky mare with a glossy well-groomed coat, and wearing a neat side-saddle, to startle a soldier. Clayborne stepped forward, and put his hand upon the sleek neck, while he looked about him to discover the owner of the animal. At his feet bubbled a spring, cool and refreshing, from its bed of white sand and pebbles, and from this source ran a small stream of water. Upon the other side of the pool grew a large tree whose friendly branches stretched out over his head. It was an old tree, gnarled and knotted, with scrubby bushes clustered around its trunk.

Gordon Clayborne felt certain that behind this

tree was concealed the owner of the horse. Now it was more than likely that she was aware of Clayborne's presence; and if she was hiding there, it was doubtless because she did not wish to be seen by him.

Captain Clayborne had not come into the woods with any idea of playing hide and seek with a mysterious woman, nor was he a man who would intrude into any lady's bower, although it were nothing more than a bower of leaves. But in wartime rules of etiquette must vary with the emergency; particularly as petticoats have been known to conceal trouser legs and cavalry boots, and a side-saddle is not positive evidence that a woman has been sitting upon it. Furthermore, he saw upon the other side at the water's edge the imprint of a man's boot, and judging from the size of the footmark it was a man of no small stature.

If the tree sheltered an enemy, strategy suggested taking him by surprise, so with a sudden leap Clayborne darted around to the other side of the tree. No sooner had he done so than he took a step backward in surprise, hastily returning a pistol to his belt.

The figure that confronted him was certainly not that of a man. The trim riding-habit concealed no cavalry boots. It was unmistakably and positively a real woman.

Under most circumstances Gordon Clayborne was not at a loss for speech, but for a few seconds he stood and stared at the young woman before him.

There are some scenes which become photographed in the mind's eye for all time, and forever afterward Gordon could recall the picture of a large oak-tree under which stood a girl, clad in a shapely riding-habit of dark blue. She was perhaps a trifle under the average in height, but so gracefully proportioned that she could never be called small. She looked full at Gordon out of a pair of deep blue eyes in which there was a startled expression, and the sensitive mouth seemed at first inclined to cry out, but evidently thought better of it, and instead the lips parted with the inquiry: —

"Why do you spring around the tree, and pounce upon me in this manner?"

"I beg a thousand pardons," said Gordon, recovering himself, and taking off his hat politely. "I regret that I startled you. I did not know just what I should find behind the tree."

"But why should you want to find any one at all?" she asked.

"I saw a pretty little filly in the woods with an empty side-saddle on her back; naturally I was interested in discovering the owner. She might be in need of assistance. In fact, there is every reason why I should have wanted to find her; but I am very sorry if I have frightened you, and I earnestly crave pardon," and he bowed again with great politeness.

The lady in the blue riding-habit looked at him more closely than her first alarm had permitted.

As she saw a young man of good presence and gallant bearing, wearing the uniform of the United States army, and with a wounded arm, she seemed to feel somewhat reassured.

"I pardon you, sir," she replied ingenuously, "but you should be careful in future how you offer assistance to young women. Perhaps you may frighten them more than you may aid them."

"I will remember your good advice," replied Clayborne, smiling pleasantly; "but if I might venture to give you a word of advice in return, I would suggest — I speak from the man's point of view — that when a person hides behind a tree, it invites pursuit."

The color came to her cheek prettily. "Perhaps I did wrong to hide," she said. "I heard some one coming through the woods, and I acted on the impulse of the moment."

"I am going to continue my word of advice," said Gordon, "and add that it is hardly safe for young ladies to ride alone through the woods."

"I am not in the habit of doing so, but this was an exceptional case. I came to the spring for — for" — She hesitated strangely in making so simple a statement, then suddenly burst out, "Oh, I wish you would not give me any more advice nor ask me any questions."

They were now standing upon the edge of the pool. For the moment Gordon had entirely forgotten the footprint in the soft earth. He was about to reply in some fair words of civility when he chanced to look down upon it.

"One question I should like to ask of you," he said: "Can you tell me who made that footmark?"

"What footmark?" she inquired quickly, while the startled look which again came into her eyes told him plainly that she knew perfectly well what he meant.

"That footmark in the moss and wet sand by the edge of the water."

"How should I know? — it may be yours — or mine. We have both been treading there."

The feigned carelessness of her reply was so very transparent as to bring a smile to Clayborne's lips.

"I am sure it is not mine," he replied, "and I hardly think it is yours; but we can measure. Will you kindly place your foot exactly on it?"

"I will not!" she exclaimed defiantly, looking at him with eyes that said, "I could tell you all about it if I would."

"You know who made it," Clayborne said firmly, as he looked straight into her eyes.

They did not flinch under his gaze, although the color came to her cheeks.

"What right have you to question me?" she demanded.

"I question you thus closely because it seems important that I should discover who made those footmarks. Your whole attitude convinces me that you can throw light upon the subject, and although I cannot force you to disclose the truth, it devolves upon me to find out."

"Do you think you are acting honorably?" she asked coldly.

"It is one of the unfortunate necessities of war," he replied, "that our suspicions are excited by the most trivial matters. Scouts and spies frequently come within our lines. Any concealment suggests hostility. That is why I am so persistent, I assure you. That is the only reason for my questions."

"And I assure you, sir, most solemnly, that I am neither a scout nor a spy." A smile played in the corners of her mouth as she spoke, and she had entirely recovered her composure.

There was something irresistible in her sudden changes from timidity to assurance. If Clayborne had deemed her actions suspicious, his misgivings were lulled to rest by the naïveté and charm of her manner.

The lady saw her advantage and followed it up rapidly.

"I am Miss Marjorie Ware; my father is General Ware of General Sherman's corps."

She spoke with such frankness that no man could ever have doubted her for a moment.

Captain Clayborne appeared slightly abashed as he replied: —

"I am sorry you did not mention that before. I should not have annoyed you with my questioning."

"You did not give me an opportunity," she answered; "and then if you doubted my word at one time, why should you believe it at another?"

"I did not doubt your word, Miss Ware. You make me feel like a villain by intimating such a thing. Whatever slight suspicions I had, have been entirely dispelled. Permit me to apologize for ever having had them."

She had untied the mare, and stood stroking the pretty creature's soft nose while Clayborne spoke.

Now she sprang unaided into the saddle.

"I pardon you readily," she replied gayly. "In return I have a favor to ask of you."

"I grant it in advance, Miss Ware."

"Do not make any attempt to trace the owner of those footprints, which are neither yours nor mine."

She looked him full in the face. She did not blush this time, nor seem in the least disconcerted. Indeed, of the two it was Clayborne who showed embarrassment, and he hastily assented.

"Do you promise solemnly?" she inquired.

"Of course I do."

"Thank you," she said simply, and cantered off through the woods.

Clayborne stood looking after her, until she had disappeared from view.

"What a fool I have made of myself! What a thundering fool!" he muttered savagely. "She evidently came to meet some favored suitor — a clandestine meeting. What affair is it of mine, however? I had no business to meddle with it. Miss Ware — father, General Ware of General Sherman's corps" — Clayborne stopped his mus-

ing suddenly, and picked up an object which lay half hidden in the bushes by the tree. It was a small basket, containing a plate, knife and fork, and a tin cup. The only evidence of food were a few crumbs of bread in the bottom of the basket. His musings took another sudden turn. "This is more than odd," he thought. "Her admirer needs to be fed secretly? Does n't he get enough at his mess table? Miss Ware — Miss Ware — what are you up to? And what did I promise? They are tremendously big boots that made those marks, too. But there is no reason why I should not return Miss Ware her property, for it is evidently hers;" and Captain Clayborne rode slowly away through the woods.

Had he not given the promise, and had he examined the tree a little more closely, he would have seen that the brushwood grew in front of a hollow trunk, and within that trunk, drawn up as far as they could go, were the boots that a short time before had stood by the spring.

"Miss Ware — Miss Ware, what are you up to?" Clayborne repeated as he cantered back to his quarters.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE CHINA-CLOSET

THE next morning Captain Gordon Clayborne, being still on the invalid list, rode out to take the air. But he was well enough to be dressed cap-a-pie, to sit firmly in the saddle upon a well-groomed horse, and to ride jauntily away with a little wicker basket on the pommel of his saddle. He made in the direction of general headquarters. The road was muddy, and his spirited chestnut horse picked his way through the black paste as if reluctant to soil the white stockings above his fetlocks.

As Captain Clayborne reined up his horse in front of headquarters, two men came out of the gate. One of them was his friend, the ubiquitous newspaper correspondent, Chesterfield. By his side walked a young sub-lieutenant, whose uniform was spick and span, with its buttons as bright as polish could make them. "Some general's favor got him his commission, I 'll wager," thought Clayborne, "and I 'll bet further that those buttons which shine so brilliantly have never been under fire."

In both of these conclusions he was right to the dot; yet if he could have read the young man's

heart he would have known that the lad was itching to see some real service.

Chesterfield, who was always as cheerful as the sun, greeted him cordially. "Well, Clayborne, I am glad to see you riding about so sprightly. I feel guilty every time I see that arm of yours, and I would gladly put my own in a sling if by so doing I could relieve yours."

Clayborne dismounted from his horse. "Oh, it was mere chance, Chesterfield; our positions might have been reversed," he answered, dismissing the subject with a laugh.

"Chance or not, it was an important matter to this correspondent, and if ever the day comes when I can render you a service, remember that Ben Chesterfield can be counted upon." Then without waiting for a reply, he said quickly: "Let me make known to you a particular young friend of mine, Lieutenant Francis Ware, a son of General Ephraim Ware."

As Clayborne shook hands with the lieutenant he scanned the young fellow's face with much interest. His hair and eyes were brown, yet there was a strong resemblance to the sister. He seemed so near her age that Gordon wondered which was the elder. His uncertainty was pardonable, for the pair were twins.

The three men stood in friendly talk for a few moments. Then they separated, Chesterfield and Ware passing out and Gordon going in, without having divulged to them the nature of his visit.

There were a number of houses in the vicinity, occupied by various officers; and a sentry pointed out to him a small house a few hundred yards distant as General Ware's own quarters. Tying his horse to a post near by, Gordon stepped on to the veranda, where a sickly vine was making a feeble attempt to climb a dilapidated trellis. The place seemed deserted, but Gordon noticed a soldier walking up and down the yard, cooling off Miss Ware's bay filly. "She has been out riding this morning," thought Clayborne, "and I am sure I could tell in what direction she rode."

Clayborne's knock was answered by the young lady herself. She recoiled a step with an exclamation of surprise, while she blushed visibly. It was more than the soft flush which comes to a girl's cheek at the moment of some sudden surprise or unexpected pleasure, and Gordon Clayborne quickly surmised there was some hidden reason for her embarrassment. He took a sly pleasure in increasing the color in her cheeks by holding out the tell-tale basket, while he studied her more carefully than upon their first meeting.

Miss Ware had doffed her riding-habit for a lighter dress, the day being warm. Her costume was of cool linen, light blue in color. It was of the simplest make and texture, yet it fitted her dainty, graceful figure so perfectly that no dress could have been more becoming to her, no matter how costly the material. This is what Gordon thought as she took the basket, saying, with open-

eyed astonishment, "Why, where in the world did you find that?"

He answered slowly, "I found it where you left it, by the spring at the foot of the oak-tree."

"And you rode over here this morning for the sole purpose of returning it to me?" she exclaimed.

"To restore your basket and for the pleasure of seeing you again, Miss Ware," replied Gordon Clayborne.

"Won't you come in and rest after your ride, Mr. Clayborne?" she inquired.

"With all my heart, Miss Ware."

She led the way to a small sitting-room. Gordon followed, half feeling as if he were intruding, for the suspicion which had been aroused in his mind the day before had been quickened by Miss Ware's own behavior as she received him. Yet had she wished to get rid of him, could she not have thought of an excuse? Gordon Clayborne was not the sort of man to cut short a talk with a pretty girl. Miss Ware was an exceptionally pretty girl, and she had awakened in him a very strong feeling of curiosity and interest.

"Father has gone off to a military conference, and so I shall have to entertain you all alone," she said, with a charming lack of self-consciousness, adding, "but I can't offer you any refreshment, for Martha has gone to market, and she keeps everything under lock and key."

"I shall not regret Martha's absence," said Clayborne, taking the seat offered him; "and with

the greatest admiration and respect for General Ware, I much prefer to have his charming daughter to entertain me."

"Martha is a dear old colored woman," said Miss Ware, with entire disregard for the compliment, "but we shall soon have to bid her good-by, for father is going to the front before long and I shall have to go up to St. Louis again."

"Is St. Louis your home, Miss Ware?"

"Oh, I have no particular home. I go about with father whenever I can. The rest of the time I stay with one of my aunts. I have aunts in St. Louis and in Washington."

"It must be a great happiness for General Ware to have his daughter with him," remarked Clayborne.

"And for me, too; I love to be with him and I don't like to stay at my aunts'," she replied.

The conversation followed along in a conventional way, both of them talking about what interested them not at all, both of them thinking busily about what interested them a good deal. Now, as has doubtless been suspected, Miss Ware's mind was occupied with a matter which to her was of considerable importance. She regretted Gordon Clayborne's visit, regarding it as rather inopportune. Beyond that it cannot be accurately stated here what she thought of him. But his thoughts about her are much easier of interpretation; they ran somewhat as follows: —

"Her hair is light brown in color; it has a

dash of gold; it is soft and wavy; it is as glossy as the skin of a fawn; it is tossed about her forehead in rebellious and bewitching little curls. Her eyes are dark blue; when she laughs or speaks with animation, the pupils dilate, and her bright eyes look still darker. Her chin is small, but well rounded and firm."

"Miss Ware, is that little filly of yours Kentucky bred?"

"Yes, Mr. Clayborne, but I bought her up in Illinois. She is the sweetest creature, and fleet as a bird."

"Her mouth is small, and firm too. It shows character. It is a very pretty mouth," thought Clayborne.

"How old is she, Miss Ware?"

"Six years old."

"I wonder if she is as old as her brother. She looks about twenty. You can tell a horse's age by looking at its teeth, but you can never tell a girl's age. She may be eighteen, she may be twenty-two. What pretty teeth she has!"

"Miss Ware, you ride extremely well; where did you learn?"

"Why, I have ridden all my life. When I was quite a little girl, father was colonel at a frontier post. I was brought up on the back of a horse, so to speak."

Several times during the conversation Gordon thought he heard a sound near at hand as of heavy breathing; once he imagined he heard a stifled

sneeze. When a person's suspicions are aroused every little incident, however trivial in itself, serves to increase them. Gordon Clayborne had not come with the slightest intention of prying into the private affairs of the young lady. He had some reason to believe that it was an adventure of a more or less romantic nature which had taken her to the spring the day before, but he did not consider the matter any of his own business. He had come solely to return Miss Marjorie Ware a basket which belonged to her. True, he might have sent it by a messenger, but Marjorie Ware was a very pretty girl; by some she might be considered a very charming girl. Gordon was of that age, between twenty and — well, we cannot with any degree of authority set the outside limit — when beauty and charm have a very potent influence upon a man's action, so he had not sent a messenger.

As he sat opposite Miss Ware, taking a mental inventory of her personal appearance, while he talked with her about the weather, and discussed the merits of her horse, he had a strong feeling that the most acceptable thing he could do would be to withdraw as soon as etiquette permitted. Miss Ware had given him to understand that she was alone; yet he had that unaccountable feeling of another presence in the vicinity. When he heard what he thought sounded like a suppressed sneeze he looked still more keenly at Miss Ware.

She was deep in a catalogue of the virtues of

Dolly Varden, the little mare. Her face was now as guileless as a spring morning. What man can look upon a fresh young girl's face, with her eyes of innocent blue, or soft brown, or sparkling black, and guess what thoughts, what musings, what fancies are concealed there? Gordon Clayborne knew no more what was going on in that head of golden-brown than the man in the moon. No, not as much, for that gentleman has opportunities of observation which are denied to us.

Gordon could no more tell by looking into the demure face opposite him what palpitations were agitating the heart, than he could have read the hieroglyphics on an Egyptian monument. But when there was a startling crash of china in a closet behind him, he sprang to his feet with positive knowledge that there was some one concealed there. Miss Ware had also risen from her chair in alarm. Gordon looked from the closet door to her. Something of his real suspicions must have been visible upon his face. Her cheek turned pink, although she kept her self-control admirably.

"She certainly carries it off easily," thought Gordon. He was about to seize upon an opportunity to withdraw from an uncomfortable situation when Miss Ware said sweetly: —

"Mr. Clayborne, I must take you into my confidence."

Gordon Clayborne, usually so gallant and so much at ease, flushed slightly, and replied rather stiffly: "I do not ask for your confidence in such

a matter, Miss Ware. I really think I had better bid you good-day, and relieve you of my presence."

She produced from the pocket of her blue linen dress a key and held it out to him.

"Here, Mr. Clayborne, will you please open that closet door?"

"Really, Miss Ware, I assure you it is no concern of mine, whoever may be concealed behind that door. I trust you will exonerate me of any desire to intrude upon you."

She came up to him and pressed the key into his hand. "I insist that you open that door at once, Mr. Clayborne," she said, with a gesture of command.

Gordon Clayborne had never before found himself in a like predicament. He was not accustomed to the rôle of confidant in the love affairs of young ladies, but it was a difficult matter to decline a command so peremptorily given by a pretty girl. He took the key, unlocked and threw back the door to its full width.

In the closet, amid some pieces of crockery which in the darkness he had knocked to the floor, stood as black an African as ever wore the badge of serfdom.

Gordon gave a gasp of surprise, then said sternly: "You black rascal, what are you doing there? Come out at once!"

"Yas, suh, yas, suh, I 'se cummin' right outer yeah, 'deed and 'deed I is," and the big negro stepped sheepishly forward. "I 'se turrible sorry

I dun broke all dat crock'ry, Miss War' ; I certainly is."

Miss Ware came close to Gordon to say in a low tone : —

" Mr. Clayborne this poor fellow is a fugitive slave who has escaped into our lines. I consider General Halleck's order that slaves must be excluded from our lines because they carry information to the enemy as grossly unjust. I have been helping this unfortunate one. You are now in possession of my secret. I beseech you not to betray it."

Clayborne broke out in a laugh.

" Heavens, Miss Ware, you don't think I am a negro-catcher, do you ? "

His look and tone and hearty laugh reassured her at once. The expression of anxiety upon her face gave place to one of radiance. " I did not know but what you would think that your duty as an army officer " — she began. He interrupted her with an impetuous gesture. " I would not go about spying for negroes for any one. If I were ordered by my superiors to expel one from the lines I should do it without question, but otherwise you could fill your whole house with them and I should never see one." Then looking at her closely, he continued: " So this is what you were about when I met you yesterday at the spring ? "

She nodded assent.

" I thought it was an entirely different matter," he replied drolly.

She had a pretty trick of blushing which was enchanting to look upon. "It had just dawned upon me that you did. I could not allow any one to entertain such a false idea of me, and so I was obliged to take you into my confidence," she replied naïvely.

Gordon laughed again. For some reason he felt both relieved and pleased.

"I felt very much annoyed that you should discover my secret, Mr. Clayborne," the young lady continued, "but I forgive you now, you have been so very considerate."

The negro, who had been standing uncomfortably shifting from one big foot to the other, now realized that he was not to be summarily dealt with by the officer.

"De Lawd bless you, Marse Claybun, de Lawd will certainly bless you for you goodness to dis yeah nigger," he exclaimed with effusion.

"That is all right," answered Gordon shortly. "I hope you are worth half the trouble this lady has taken for you. What is your name?"

"Ma name 's Apollo, Marse, an' I 'se wuf consid'ble."

"Apollo," said Miss Ware, "go back into the closet, and conceal yourself until I can think of something to do for you, and mind, Apollo, don't you break anything more."

"Miss War', I 'll conceal ma person jes' ez small ez I kin, but for de Lawd's sake, Miss, doan't yer let de sojer troops sen' me back;" and Apollo's big form disappeared into the closet.

"I don't see what I am to do with him," sighed Marjorie. "He is so big. I have been feeding him for two days, and he eats so much!"

Gordon's laugh seemed to indicate a lack of sympathy. "I think, Miss Ware, you had better allow me to turn this fellow over to the provost marshal. Indeed, you will find him an elephant on your hands."

"How can you suggest such a thing!" she cried, her eyes flashing. "I will shelter him as long as I can. I will feed him as long as I can procure an ounce of food."

Gordon looked at her with the same peculiar smile on his lips. "You cannot keep him hidden twenty-four hours, Miss Ware."

"I think you are very ungenerous, Mr. Clayborne, to speak like this, particularly after you have been so kind. I had begun to hope you would aid me. Now I see I cannot look to any one for help."

"I 'll tell you what I will do, Miss Ware. If you can keep this dark-skinned Apollo hidden until nightfall, I will send a couple of soldiers who will see that he is escorted through our lines to the river. He can get on one of the boats and find plenty of work to do. They are using lots of negroes in that way as contrabands."

"Will you really, Mr. Clayborne?" cried Marjorie, with a note of pleasure in her voice.

"I will, Miss Ware, if you wish it."

"Wish it," she cried, "I wish it of all things in the world. Oh, you have made me so happy."

Clayborne regarded her smilingly. "So you are an Abolitionist?" he inquired in a tone of great interest.

"Of course I am," she answered, opening wide her blue eyes; "are n't you?"

"No, not I!"

"No," she repeated, "and yet you are fighting to abolish slavery."

"I am fighting to preserve the Union. I am obeying my oath as an officer," he replied emphatically.

Marjorie Ware looked up into his face. Her head did not come higher than his shoulder, and to him she seemed very small and delicate. There was a light of intense earnestness in her eyes and her mouth wore its most determined expression, as she said: —

"You and many other brave men like you are fighting to abolish slavery. You may not know it, but you are all *Abolitionists*." She spoke with that tone of conviction which is in a woman's voice when she decides a point admitting of no argument.

Gordon Clayborne did not attempt any reply. To tell the truth, he was more interested in looking at the fair logician than in following the thread of her logic.

"But you will take care of poor Apollo," she said quickly.

"I certainly will, Miss Ware."

"You are very kind, Mr. Clayborne, and I

appreciate your kindness." She held out her hand to him in her frank, open way. "I hope you will come and see me again and let me thank you."

"I certainly will come and see you again, Miss Ware, since you give me the permission." Then raising his voice he called out sternly: "Apollo, you rest easy there and don't you allow a square inch of your black hide to be seen by any one until I send for you."

"Lawdy, Marse Claybun, I'll stay yeah, jes' lak I 'se a log," came in muffled tones from behind the door.

Gordon took leave of Miss Marjorie Ware, and as he rode off, said to himself, smilingly: "She is a red-hot little Abolitionist," and then as he continued musing: "I think my mother, if she were here, would be an Abolitionist also."

CHAPTER VIII

A SUDDEN PARTING

General Grant was going down to the seat of active operations once more, and Clayborne, who no longer wore his arm in a sling, was anticipating the honor of again commanding his bodyguard. He was looking forward to the change with the expectancy which the vigorous, active man takes in the thought of employment.

The few weeks he had passed in Memphis had been, nevertheless, spent most pleasantly. Chance, assisted by some design on his own part, had enabled him to see a good deal of Marjorie Ware. He had punctiliously kept the promise he had made to her, and Apollo had been expelled from the lines in a manner which gave him an opportunity to get on board one of the boats plying the Mississippi in the Union service. By this act Gordon won the everlasting gratitude of the negro and, what was of greater moment, the high regard of Marjorie Ware.

The young lady had spent a number of the years of her short life in the environment of the army, on the frontier, where she had learned to manage a horse and handle a rifle with equal dexterity.

She was passionately fond of horses, and few were the days when she did not ride out on her favorite little filly, "Dolly Varden." Gordon Clayborne not only had a keen appreciation for beauty, but he knew a good horse when he saw it. The one he rode was a thoroughbred of his own purchase, and somehow he managed frequently to ride in company with the general's daughter.

The life of unrestraint and freedom, which the young girl had enjoyed while living on the plains, had bred in her an artlessness which, added to the natural frankness and sincerity of her nature, made her companionship most refreshing. All the Claybornes had the faculty of turning a pretty compliment, and in the attractive Marjorie, Gordon would have found a charming subject for these graceful courtesies, except that she either unconsciously or willfully ignored them. His most graceful shafts fell pointless to the ground before the armor of her indifference. So the poor fellow gave up in despair trying to please her in this way, and when the habit became too strong within him, was forced to give it vent by praising the good points of her filly, which attention Marjorie seemed to appreciate thoroughly. Yet the young lady was not indifferent to Gordon Clayborne. She liked his society; she showed it in her frank way, and the time passed very pleasantly in the lull of warfare, while the wound in the soldier's arm was healing rapidly.

It was with mingled feelings of satisfaction

and regret that Clayborne received orders to hold himself in readiness to go down to Corinth. His spirits had no sooner leapt up at the thought of going to the front, than Marjorie Ware's golden-brown head recalled itself to his inward eye. He had just come out of the adjutant's office when he decided to go and see her and bid her good-by. The distance to General Ware's house was about a mile, but Gordon set out on foot rather than take the trouble to send for his horse, which was at his own quarters. He had not gone more than half the distance when he saw in front of him the young lady who was in his thoughts. While she was still afar, he had caught sight of the well-known figure walking rapidly with free swinging step, and he knew instantly it was Marjorie, although as a rule she went about on horseback, and rarely walked in the city alone.

She was preoccupied, and was not aware of his presence until he was close upon her. Then she looked up with a smile of recognition. Before he could greet her a soldier brushed between them, jostling the young lady somewhat rudely. The fellow, although not drunk, had evidently been drinking, and the apology was either not forthcoming or was delayed. Gordon's hot blood flashed up in an instant. His right hand shot out and knocked the lout down into the gutter, where he lay like a felled ox. Marjorie gave a cry of dismay. "Oh, you have killed him, Mr. Clayborne."

"If I have, it is no more than he deserved," replied Gordon warmly.

Marjorie, who could not bear to see the meanest creature suffer, bent over the man with anxiety. Gordon endeavored to reassure her. "I reckon he 's not dead; you can't kill these fellows so easily, Miss Ware." Nevertheless, he helped the man to rise with some feeling of compunction at having punished him so severely.

The fellow came up rather dazed, but beyond a lump on his forehead the size of a hen's egg, he was not injured.

Gordon pressed a dollar into his hand, saying sternly: "Now, sir, go along with you, and let this teach you not to jostle a lady in the street without offering an apology." The soldier, glad to be quit of the encounter so easily, disappeared at once.

"You hardly gave him time to apologize, Mr. Clayborne," said Marjorie; "but I suppose he was intoxicated, and did not care where he went or whom he collided with."

"He touched you, Miss Ware, and I just could not help striking him, indeed, I could not," replied Gordon fervently; "but I 'm sorry for him if you are. I hope you 're not offended with me."

In the look and smile which she gave him there was a touch of admiration, as she said: "Of course I am not offended with you, Mr. Clayborne."

Gordon saw a shadow follow the smile on her face, and said quickly: —

"You have something troubling you, Miss Ware. Tell me what it is."

"My father's health has become so poor that he has been relieved of his command and ordered to Washington."

"I am very, very sorry," said Gordon, with sympathy.

"You see, I don't know how I feel about it," Marjorie continued. "I'm sorry for my father, who is broken-hearted at being obliged to give up his command. I am worried about him, too; still, I cannot help feeling a little glad, for he will be safe in Washington; and yet I suppose that is weak and selfish of me," she went on, all in one breath. Then she looked up into his face, saying with a droll little smile, "You don't know what it is to be torn by so many conflicting emotions, do you, Mr. Clayborne?"

"Yes, I do," protested Gordon, "for I have been ordered to the front, and I have got to say good-by to you."

They had been walking towards General Ware's quarters, and here they reached the gate.

"You were coming to say good-by," exclaimed Marjorie, stopping suddenly, "and I am never going to see you again?" There was a note of real regret in her voice, which she made no attempt to conceal.

"Yes, you will, Miss Ware. I shall certainly find you again. When this war is over, I shall come to Washington, or St. Louis, or wherever you may be; and — and you won't forget me, meanwhile, will you?"

"Why, Mr. Clayborne! is anything the matter? You are becoming so pale!" cried Marjorie in alarm.

"The fact is, Miss Ware, I forgot and hit that fellow with my right hand. I fear I have reopened that old wound," Gordon answered, smiling grimly.

"Oh, let me call the surgeon at once!" she cried in sympathy.

"No, indeed, Miss Ware; the pain will pass in a moment. I don't think it is serious, and the surgeon might say that I was unfit to go with my company to-morrow."

She looked at him with compassion. "But you hurt yourself in my behalf," she insisted, "and it may be more serious than you are willing to admit. Won't you please come and see the surgeon?"

"No, Miss Ware, not now. I must be going. I am not thinking of the hurt at present. I shall manage to see you again to-morrow, to say a final good-by."

Gordon Clayborne did have an opportunity to repeat his good-by on the morning following. Marjorie promised not to forget him; she agreed to write to him; and then they were separated by that relentless destiny which so constantly comes into the lives of human beings, and drives them apart just when they would ask for a little more indulgence in the way of time.

Miss Ware went with the general to Washington, and the wound in Gordon's arm did not pre-

vent him from riding away with his company. The limb was quite stiff for a week, and though he made no complaint, he was obliged to favor it. And if he had received any deeper wounds, he managed to hide them also; for no man in the regiment was of lighter heart or more joyous courage than Gordon Clayborne.

CHAPTER IX

A FEW OLD LETTERS

DURING the summer and the winter which followed, the only record I have of Captain Gordon Clayborne's acquaintance with Miss Marjorie Ware is contained in some letters.

These letters are penned in the bold, firm hand of a young man, and in the more delicate writing of a young woman. As they were found tied together in one package, it is with a feeling of some delicacy that I undo the knot which binds them, because the very nature of a written paper sent under seal suggests a confidential communication. Letters are rarely intended for other eyes than of those to whom they are addressed. But in this instance, these epistles of youthful friendship are used to complete and fill out the thread of the narrative; so I untie the ribbon and place the contents of the letters before the reader's eye.

The ribbon that was wound about this little packet has long since faded beyond all recognition of its original hue, the paper is yellow, and the ink is dim; the man's hand which wrote the lines has now laid aside the sword, and the soft brown hair of the girl is a softer gray; but the

hearts that dictated the letters are as warm to-day as they were then, for years cannot dim nor age wither the true spirit of life.

ARMY OF THE TENNESSEE, September —, 1862.

MY DEAR MISS WARE, — After you left Memphis, and I saw the steamer go off up the river, I went back to camp, feeling as deep a blue as the color of a riding-costume I had known. I do not know what I should have done, if I had been obliged to remain long in Memphis after you left it. I had not realized before how dreadfully uninteresting the town was, and how wearisome garrison life could be. The city seemed pleasant while you were in it; life in the camp was not dull.

I rejoiced greatly when I was sent off to rejoin my regiment. I should have written you before, but two things prevented. Almost immediately I was ordered to go upon a small expedition to the Tennessee River. I had an accident at the very start. I am an unlucky fellow, but I am evidently destined to die by neither the bullet nor by water. This time I was in the water so long that a chill resulted, and I was laid up in the hospital for several weeks.

We have also had a skirmish. It was a small affair. You will hardly have seen it mentioned in the papers.

There are rumors that another battle will be fought soon. I saw General Grant yesterday, riding about the fortifications. I see him frequently

engaged in inspecting our defenses, and in battle he is always where the "firing is heaviest;" yet some people who remain in Washington, and who are themselves more familiar with the smell of a whiskey flask than they are with the smell of gunpowder, still declare that he is incompetent, and that he drinks. If you meet any of these villifiers, just give them a piece of your mind in your most emphatic manner.

I hope that I shall soon hear from you, and that you will tell me how you like Washington, what you are doing, how you are; and how "Dolly" is. Do you take a daily canter on the pretty filly? I shall never forget our rides about Memphis. I miss those rides very much. It was such a great pleasure for me to take them, that I shall always think kindly of the bullet which put me on the hospital list and made those rides possible. I do not know when you and I shall meet again, but I feel sure that I shall certainly see you again some day. In the mean time I shall do my best to be worthy of your friendship. To possess your regard and esteem will always be the ambition of

Your sincere friend,

GORDON CLAYBORNE.

WASHINGTON, D. C., September —, 1862.

MY DEAR MR. CLAYBORNE, — I read about the battle in the newspapers, and before then I had heard something about you. I was beginning to

wonder why I had heard nothing from you, for you had declared so positively that you were going to write me at once. I will confess that I was somewhat piqued at the thought that you should have so soon forgotten me, when one day I picked up a newspaper and learned all about the "accident" of which your letter brings me such meagre news. Luckily the newspaper correspondent, who signs himself B. C. and who is evidently a man of discernment, gives the world a true account of your accident; and lest you are not informed as to the facts of the case, I send you the clipping from the paper, so that you may read Mr. B. C.'s own words.

"On the night of August — a small body of men were sent out to make a reconnoissance on the eastern side of the Tennessee River. The party was in command of Major Rand, and consisted of Companies D and K, 1st Cavalry, the latter company under the command of Captain Gordon Clayborne. While in the act of embarking upon a small steamboat, Major Rand slipped from the gang-plank and fell between the steamer and the river bank. The gap into which the unfortunate officer fell was barely two feet wide, with a considerable current running through it. The night was so intensely dark, that although lanterns were at once lowered no trace of Major Rand could be discovered, and as no cries came up from the black crevice at their feet, his comrades feared that he had been stunned by the fall and carried off down the river by the current.

"The engineer was on the point of starting the boat from the shore in order that a final but almost hopeless search might be made for the missing man, when Captain Clayborne, the second in command, came upon the scene. He instantly forbade the engineer to move lest the paddle-wheels strike and crush the unfortunate officer, and without more ado swung himself down into the water. The captain dove under the boat several times. He remained for so long a time under water that those above began to fear that they had lost both of their officers, when he finally reappeared with the major's body in his arms. Ropes were lowered, and the rescuer and rescued were quickly drawn to the river bank, where Captain Clayborne sank down utterly exhausted.

"It seems that Major Rand had been stunned by his sudden fall and had drifted into the paddle-wheel. But for the quick decision and heroic action of his subordinate officer he would never again have been seen alive. Both he and the captain were finally resuscitated and taken back to camp, where the former was soon as well as ever. The captain, however, whose constitution had been somewhat weakened by a recent wound, is now lying in a hospital suffering with a cold and fever brought on by his tremendous exertion and his long exposure in the water. If he recovers it is thought that Congress will reward such bravery by promotion or by the presentation of an appropriate medal."

This is what I read, Captain Clayborne, a short graphic account of your "accident." The writer does not use any superfluous words in recounting it. He merely relates the facts as they were, in terse, journalistic style; but those of us who can read between the lines can see the dark abyss, with its cold, seething water; can hear the shouts of excitement; can feel the fear and the despair at the thought that a fellow creature's life is in jeopardy. Then we can see the man of calm courage throw himself down into the black chasm to risk his life for another. Our hearts stand still at his daring, then throb with apprehension, for he also seems to be lost in the flood. We count the seconds; they seem to lengthen into an eternity of suspense until finally he does return to us bearing the form of the man he has saved. I am proud of you, Captain Gordon Clayborne, and I am proud of your friendship and of your regard.

Believe me always your sincere friend,

MARJORIE WARE.

P. S. Yes, "Dolly" is as dear a little creature as ever. I am sure she does not forget the many pleasant rides we had last summer, nor the kind friend who fed her lumps of sugar.

ARMY OF THE TENNESSEE, October —, 1862.

MY DEAR MISS WARE, — I cannot tell you on such poor paper how great a pleasure your letter gave me.

Although you greatly exaggerated my adventure, it makes me glad that your warm, generous nature does exaggerate the act of one who thinks much more of your approbation than of any applause which he may have received from others. No, I am not the proud possessor of a gold medal from Congress. Neither have I as yet been promoted. The writer of the newspaper article was a Mr. Benjamin Chesterfield, a personal friend of mine, who in the warmth of his heart and the enthusiasm of his friendship magnified my performance of duty into a deed of heroism, but I am none the less grateful to him and to you. If ever I should win any of those laurels which it would be affectation for a soldier to belittle, their worth will be enhanced by the thought that they would be valued by one for whom I have such high regard, such sincere admiration, as I have for you.

How long the time seems to me since I bade you good-by at Memphis! Since I cannot see you, pray let me hear from you frequently. If I could only tell you what a great source of happiness, what an event in my life, is the receipt of one of your letters, I am sure you would send them oftener than you do. I think I must have written you two letters for each one received, and I would write more but for fear of wearying you. I regret that I have not been gifted with that eloquence of pen or tongue which some men possess. But perhaps it is better for you that nature has denied me these gifts, for if I had them I should use the pen

in writing constantly to you, and my eloquence would serve to sing your praises. I am, however, but an ordinary mortal, and one who, if he cannot express all he feels, thinks constantly of you.

Your devoted friend,

GORDON CLAYBORNE.

ARMY OF THE TENNESSEE, February —, 1863.

MY DEAR MISS WARE, — What a world of pleasure your letters this winter have given me. What a sustaining force is the sympathy and the encouragement of a good and noble-minded woman. I think you have received all my letters, although there are some one or two which you have not answered specifically. The winter has been tedious in the extreme. We have camped and lived in rain and mud. We have marched from one place to another. We have made feints of attacking the enemy. He has often threatened us, and there have been some skirmishes, but no real engagements. Homesickness and disease have disheartened and worn upon us, but with such cheerful and inspiring letters as yours to enliven me and to support my courage I should be a craven if I despaired.

Now we are really to move. Yes, the reports in the papers are correct. It is no secret. Vicksburg is our objective point. When we shall get there I do not know, but I am one of those, and the army is full of them, who trust in the leader, General Grant. He has said: "We cannot go

backward now. There is only one thing to be done, and that is to go *forward to decisive victory!*" And we shall go forward. He has started all his corps commanders, Sherman, McClernand, and McPherson, on the move, and is setting every one an example in activity himself. He does not travel with a large equipment of personal baggage. He puts his old brier pipe, a pouch of tobacco, and a toothbrush in his pocket and is off to the front. That 's the kind of a general he is. What a man he is! I remember once after a hot day's battle he happened to ride out near our regiment. Every one recognized him at once on his cream-colored horse "Jack." The boys all surrounded him, crying out for a speech.

The general, who is not afraid of any living thing, actually seemed embarrassed.

"You 'll have to make them a speech, General, to get rid of them," prompted Rawlins. General Grant hesitated a moment and then said: —

"Soldiers, I thank you. That is all I can say. You 've done a good day's work to-day, but you will have to do a better one to-morrow."

And they did do better work the next day.

There is not one of us who would not follow him anywhere; so you may be sure all those who can keep up will get to Vicksburg.

I do not know when I shall ever see you again. The end of the war seems so far in the future I dare not look for it. But no matter how long the years are, I shall never forget you. I think of you

at all times as the little girl who has added so much to my life. Softly to myself I call you "my little comrade." You will let me continue to do this, will you not? When the war is over I shall find you again, and throughout all the intervening years I shall remain

Your true and devoted friend,
GORDON CLAYBORNE.

WASHINGTON, D. C., February —, 1863.

MY DEAR MR. CLAYBORNE,—I am glad that my letters have been cheerful and have been a help to you this winter. I have felt so helpless myself. I have been so unhappy at the thought I was doing so little while others were doing so much more, that your assurance that any poor words of mine have been an encouragement and a sustaining force to one who has been enduring the privations and incurring the dangers of war is balm to my troubled spirit. I have frequently begged my father to allow me to volunteer as a nurse in the field. He has always replied that he could not spare me, that I must stay and look out for him. Indeed, the poor man has been far from well, and I know he has needed me, but I have extracted the promise from him that should he at any time return to the front, he will allow me to go as a nurse and do my part of the work as befits a soldier's daughter. He has now recovered much of his former strength, and hopes to be ordered to return to the field, and if not to his place in General

Sherman's corps, at least to some position of active service. In that case I shall exact the fulfillment of our agreement, and shall come to the front to nurse the wounded. You can hardly know how much it would mean to me to feel that I should be doing something to help the brave men who have given up everything for their country.

Oh, Mr. Clayborne, I have sometimes felt so very despondent here in Washington this winter. Perhaps the atmosphere has had something to do with it. There have been so many birds of evil omen flying about, predicting ruin and disaster, that at times I hardly dared lift up my voice. I felt almost wicked to be so faint-hearted, but at times I could not rise above it. But one day I had a lesson which I shall never forget. It was at a reception at the White House, not one of the public receptions, but an evening affair at which the President met the members of his cabinet, the army officers who were in the city at the time, and some of the congressmen. I was there with my father. It was shortly after the horrible Fredericksburg disaster, and we were talking about it sadly. The President came into the room, and although the conversation had been subdued before, by common consent it now seemed to cease, and a hush fell upon the assembly. I shall never forget the expression on Mr. Lincoln's face as he walked across the room to where a group of senators and generals were standing. I stood very near him, and I could not help looking steadily at him. I

had never dreamed that such sadness could be in any human eyes; and withal they were so soft, so gentle, so loving that the tears came to my own eyes from very sympathy. Some of the senators were criticising the generals in the field — with some justice perhaps, although it seemed hardly fair to speak so severely of men who were not there to defend themselves. Mr. Lincoln listened patiently, now and then putting in a word which I could not catch. Finally one senator — he was from one of the large Western States — spoke of Grant. He spoke in such an outrageous manner, it made my blood boil to hear him. He said that General Grant was utterly reckless of human life, that he was bloodthirsty, and did not care how many men were killed. He cried out in a loud voice, "The man drinks; he is unfit to command troops!" and ended with these words: "Now, Mr. President, there is a large number in Congress clamoring for Grant's removal. Will you not assure us that he will be removed?"

"No, sir," was the firm answer.

"Then, Mr. President, I think it is due to Congress and the American people to be told why you refuse to remove this man."

"You can tell all those members of Congress, Mr. Senator," replied Mr. Lincoln in a quiet but so clear a tone as to be heard all over the room, "that the reason I will not remove General Grant is because I rather like the man."

The senator turned scarlet and left the room in

a rage. A few moments later the President was chatting and talking with another group of men and evidently telling some amusing story, but his eyes never lost their look of unutterable sadness and deep, loving sympathy.

When I went to bed that night I said to myself, "If the President, who has such overpowering burdens upon his shoulders, can bear up under them and not lose hope and faith and courage, surely I am a little coward to give way to doubt and despair. I will do so no more."

I have felt better since that night. With the new year came the Emancipation Proclamation. I think that was the greatest document the world has ever seen. And now I have got a position as hospital nurse here in Washington, I shall do what I can, and I shan't despair any more, and I know we shall win. Perhaps later, if I come to the front I shall see you, Mr. Clayborne, and you can really call me a "comrade," as you did in one of your letters.

Always your sincere friend,

MARJORIE WARE.

CHAPTER X

BENJAMIN CHESTERFIELD, NON-COMBATANT

BENJAMIN CHESTERFIELD, the correspondent of a St. Louis newspaper, had been with the Army of the West since the first clash of arms in Missouri. The reports he had sent to his paper had been accurate and graphic; they were the result of his own personal observations at the front. Before the trenches at Donelson, when a battalion which had lost its leader was wavering in the fight, Chesterfield looked up coolly from his note-book, and seeing its plight, waved his lead pencil in the air, and with a "Come on, boys, this is the way out," rallied them to the charge.

At Shiloh, seated on a log in the woods, he had seen two Yankee regiments chased from the field, and a brigade of the enemy dart by him in full pursuit. Chesterfield arose from his seat, stretched his long legs, squared his big shoulders, put his note-book quietly into his pocket, and followed slowly after them.

Imbued with an ardent love of action and a thirst for adventure, Chesterfield seemed to possess the happy knack of being everywhere and seeing everything; and although this omnipresent gentle-

man sometimes came into possession of important military secrets, such were his good judgment and patriotism that he could be relied upon not to divulge information that would be of value to the enemy, or hamper the plans of the generals in command.

In the early spring of '63 Grant still had the Vicksburg problem to solve.

As to what that problem was the country at large knew very little. As to how it should be solved everybody seemed to know a great deal; as to how Grant intended to solve it nobody knew at all. Therefore everybody clamored for the immediate solution.

While digging, dredging, and engineering was going on in the river above Vicksburg, the restless Chesterfield, thinking that it would take some time for the bottom of the Mississippi to be scooped up, took the boat one day and started off up the river to Memphis. Chesterfield was one of the few, beside the President of the United States, who thought that General Grant knew what he was about, and was satisfied to await the developments which time would bring forth. But he was not satisfied to wait in idleness. He had to be doing something, so he started off on an exploit of his own. What his particular plan was is unimportant, because it never matured. He got off the steamer at Memphis, leaving it to continue on its way to St. Louis, while he put up for the night at a hotel.

In the early gray of the next morning, while low, threatening clouds hung along the horizon, big Ben Chesterfield, on a villainous-looking but sturdy little horse, rode out of the town alone.

The Mississippi River was open all the way up from Vicksburg to St. Louis, and the adjoining country was under control of the United States; but it was infested with guerrillas who were not always over-scrupulous in their treatment of non-combatants. However, Ben Chesterfield had a disregard for danger in proportion to his size, and this is saying a good deal, for he stood six feet two in his stockings; and the small, ragged-looking steed he now bestrode could have verified that he sat in the saddle at full two hundred pounds.

Whither the enterprising Mr. Chesterfield was bound on this April morning is a matter of small concern, because he never reached the intended goal.

It was getting towards the noon hour, and Chesterfield, jogging along carelessly, with the bridle on the horse's neck, did not see a small wire which had been strung with fell intent across the road. The unmindful rider was just reaching for a package of sandwiches in his saddle-bag when the horse stumbled violently, and fell to his knees, throwing the war correspondent forward to the ground. Chesterfield lay quite still with his head in the mud. He had a vague consciousness of some one feeling in his pockets, and of fragments of a conversation going on about him. Gradually

he succeeded in collecting his scattered senses, and heard the words : —

"I 'll bet a jew's-harp he 's broke his neck."

"No, he ain't; he 's only stunned."

This reassuring reply seemed to revive the fallen man somewhat, and opening one eye cautiously he allowed it to travel slowly up the leg of a pair of blue overalls, across a butternut shirt, until it rested upon a tow head crowned by a ragged straw hat.

"Doggone it, if here ain't a bottle of rot-skull," cried a joyful voice. Peeping through his eyelids, Chesterfield saw another and similar figure bending over him, holding an old-fashioned musket in one hand, while with the other he searched his pockets.

"Here, you, let me have that!" cried one.

"No, I got it first."

"But I diskivered him."

Big Chesterfield rose suddenly to his feet and made a clutch at the two grotesque spectres. He was giddy from his fall; they both dodged out of his reach, and with a yell sprang away like deer, and were off fifty yards up the road before they turned and looked back at him, panting.

"Hi, Jotham, you 've dropped the whiskey bottle; go back and get it."

"I 'll do no such thing. You go yourself. You diskivered him."

"I 'll be 'dad-rotted' if I go; he 's too big for me to tackle."

Chesterfield picked up the musket and began to examine it.

"Hi, look out thar, he 's going to shoot! We 'd better tuck our tails an' git." Suiting the action to the words they were off up the road, running like two scared dogs, and driving Chesterfield's horse before them. The correspondent fired the charge of buckshot in their direction, which only served to accelerate their pace, and they were soon lost to sight.

Left to his own meditation, the correspondent picked up the whiskey flask from the road, brushed the dirt from it, and replaced it in his pocket. The slender wire, stretched across the road a few inches from the ground, and fastened to a sapling on each side of the way, caught his eye. "That comes pretty near making me mad," he said, tearing it up with a vigorous tug. Then he sat down on a stone by the wayside, and taking out his pocket-knife began calmly to scrape off some of the mud with which he was plastered. He had been engaged in this pastime for about a quarter of an hour when he raised his head to listen intently. His quick ear had caught the sound of galloping hoofs and the snort of a horse. Closing his knife, he put it away and drew the musket to his side. A horseman riding suddenly around a bend in the road saw a figure loom up before him. With a frightened snort his horse threw himself back on his haunches, with Chesterfield's big form blocking the way.

"Tell me quickly without stopping to think which side you are for, the Union or Confederate?"

and Chesterfield thrust the musket in the man's face.

The rider looked along the rusty barrel to the besplashed figure at the other end.

"Speak quick."

"I 'm a loyal supporter of the Confederate cause."

"You 're just the man I 've been waiting for. Get down off that horse."

"What do you mean?" was the stammering rejoinder.

"I mean I 'm delighted to meet the Southern Confederacy on such a fine horse. I 'll take the horse and you can go."

"Fellow, I 'm bound on important business down the river. Let me pass!"

"I am bound on important business myself," replied Chesterfield, "and I need a horse, a nice horse with a glossy mane and long tail. That one you 're on just answers the description, so I 'll trouble you to get off and let me mount." Chesterfield tossed the old musket to one side and drew a Colt's revolver. The rider urged his steed forward, aiming a blow at Chesterfield's head with the butt of his whip. With one hand on the bridle the correspondent stayed the animal's progress while he caught the whip from the man's hand and threw it into a ditch. "Come now, let me coax you from your seat," he said quietly, leveling his weapon.

The rider was a slender, boyish fellow with a

smooth face and a bright eye; he was also a discreet young man. He knew he was no match for his large opponent, and slid from his seat with the best grace he could command. "What are you going to do now?" he asked doggedly, his right hand creeping towards his belt.

"Hands above your head," was Chesterfield's word of command.

Cursing his own stupidity at being taken unawares, the young man obeyed. "You 're the first man who ever caught me like this," he growled, as Chesterfield relieved him of his weapons.

Whistling blithely the cheerful correspondent transferred a pair of pistols to his own belt.

"I guess that 's all," Chesterfield said, stepping back a pace and still holding the horse by the bridle. "You can have that old musket there by the roadside; it 's not loaded," he continued.

"Look a-here," exclaimed the other; "I don't know who you are or what your game is. I 'm willing to admit that I belong to the Southern Confederacy"—

"You have admitted it," was the rejoinder.

"Well, I 'm willing to stand by it; but I 'd have you know that horse is my personal property. It don't belong to the Southern Confederacy. I appeal to you as a gentleman not to rob me of it."

"I had a horse, my own personal property. I bought him yesterday. He was n't much to look at, but I was getting attached to him. Half an hour ago he was confiscated by some of 'your

people.' I 'll give you a cartel of exchange. When you bring 'Rags' to me I 'll return your horse. Let us effect the exchange, say at Vicksburg in ninety days from date."

"I spoke to you as to a gentleman," replied the other man haughtily. "If you wish I 'll buy my property from you."

"My dear young rebel, I 'm fond of games, but I don't trade in horses to make money. In this deal I come out ahead, but I solemnly promise to return your horse to you upon receipt of my own. Until then I shall keep yours."

"But I did not take your horse," answered the Confederate desperately.

"My dear little reb, you know that in this game we never shoot the man who shot us, but some other fellow. We 're sorry for the other fellow, but we let him have it just the same."

"I 'll give you two hundred dollars — not Confederate bills, but Federal money."

Chesterfield mounted the horse.

"Three hundred dollars" —

"That 's too much."

"I don't care. I want the horse. Name your own price."

"There must be some extra fine points about this animal which I don't see. I guess I 'll keep him until I discover what they are," and Chesterfield rode jauntily away, leaving the young man fuming in the middle of the road.

Chesterfield rode rapidly. The day was fickle,

with sharp showers followed by genial sunshine which would last only for a few minutes, when the streaked sky would again become overcast and large drops of rain would patter on the young green of the woods.

The correspondent's disposition was proof against all conditions of weather. He went blithely forward along a bad road, through a hostile country, with never a thought as to danger or discomfort. Towards the latter part of the afternoon he recollected he had not dined. His dinner was in the saddle-pouch on "Rag's" back. There were no saddle-bags on the horse which he now bestrode, but a holster for a pistol hung at the saddle-bow. Chesterfield opened it and instead of finding a revolver drew forth a plug of tobacco. "My Confederate friend was traveling with light equipment and only burdened himself with the necessities of life," thought the correspondent as he dropped the plug back into its place. "Well, I can go without eating until"—

"Throw up your hands, young fellow," said a quiet voice so near that it made him start.

Chesterfield had ridden into an ambush. On each side of the road in front of him stood a man with a rifle leveled at his head. The newspaper correspondent felt himself at a decided disadvantage. In the words of the gentleman from whom he had so recently parted, he cursed himself for being caught in such an awkward predicament, but he threw up his hands with seeming alacrity.

A short pause ensued. The two men holding the game in their hands were in no hurry to force matters to a conclusion, but took their time to survey the man whom they held up. Chesterfield returned their stare with cool composure while he studied them minutely. They were muscular specimens of young manhood with bold and hardy features. Their belts were heavy with knives and pistols, while their shining rifle barrels reflected the care they bestowed upon their weapons. Their whole demeanor showed that they knew how to use these weapons, and Ben Chesterfield knew that if he yielded to the impulse to ride off with a sudden dash, it would be but a short ride and his last one.

"Young feller," said the walking arsenal on his left hand, "I would like to ask you a few questions." His interlocutor was ten years his junior in point of age, but he fingered the trigger of his gun so delicately that Chesterfield had no wish to argue that matter.

"Spout ahead, old man," he replied cheerfully. "Put me through my catechism."

"What is your name?"

"Benjamin Chesterfield."

"Where hev yer come from, Mr. Chesterfield?"

"From down the river."

"Where are yer bound for?"

"I 'm going up yonder as far as Collier's."

"Where did you git that hoss?"

"This horse? Why, he 's my horse."

"How long has he been yer hoss?"

"Oh, about two hours. I got him in a trade down yonder."

"Which side are you on?" was the next question in a peremptory tone.

"Oh, why not put me down a neutral?"

"We don't have no such chaps around here, young feller." Then speaking sternly: "You say you come from down the river. Any one might do that. Yer goin' up yonder. Any one might be doin' that. But you 're ridin' a hoss I know. It belongs to a partner of mine. The feller that took him got away with him on a dark night, and there ain't a hoss in the State as can catch up to him. It 'll be mighty unhealthy for the man who stole 'Starlight' if we lay hold of him, so you 'd better speak pert."

Chesterfield felt that much depended upon his next answer. There was no trifling written in the young fellow's eye; he meant every word he uttered, while the man on the opposite side of the road had for some minutes past been handling his rifle with a manifest impatience which disturbed even the steady nerves of the war correspondent. "Gentlemen," he said with sudden frankness, "I don't know who you are. You may be Confederate soldiers. You may be Union scouts. You may be home guards; but I 'm the correspondent for a Northern newspaper. I am classed under the head of non-combatants, but I can put up a pretty fair fight when the odds are right."

"That 's all right, young feller, as far as it goes," and the rifle was lowered a little, "but it don't explain about the hoss."

"If you 'll only ask your comrade to stop fingering that rifle of his so lovingly, I 'll explain about the horse. Thank you. As I said before, I got this horse in a trade. Some bushrangers relieved me of my own property, and when this handsome animal came cantering down the road I took him to make the trade even."

"Was n't there anybody on his back?"

"There was, a young Confederate; but as I did not have any need of him I sent him off to look for my nag."

"If what yer say is true, you 're all right. We won't bother with any war correspondents; but you 'll hev to prove it 's true first, so yer jest come along with us and see the old man. He 'll hev a talk with you, and if you 're the feller that stole that hoss from him, all I can say is, you 're the unluckiest hoss thief I ever seen. It would have been better for yer to have stolen every other hoss in the State of Tennessee than this."

"I 'll go and see the 'old man' with the greatest of pleasure," was the cordial reply.

"You 'll go anyway. Just slide off the hoss. We 'll take charge of him. Bill, you take Dad's hoss and lead the way. This here war correspondent 'll come right along after you and I 'll be rear guard. Forward march!"

Through the bushes and into the woods they

plunged. Chesterfield could not see the sign of a path; yet his captors never hesitated, but pushed on at a rapid gait in silence.

"I trust that I 'll have no difficulty in convincing the 'old man' as to my spotless character," he mused, "for it might be unpleasant if he insisted upon identifying me as the man who stole 'Starlight' on that dark night."

The young man in front stopped and held up his hand, then broke the stillness of the woods by giving the shrill cry of the catbird. They waited in silence for a minute. Then came a series of calls with a few moments' interval between them, the first so near at hand that it seemed to come from a thicket at Chesterfield's side; the others faintly from the distance. "Advance, friend," cried a voice just ahead of them, and Chesterfield's conductors gave him the word. They went forward, passing a man leaning against a tree. His attitude was careless, and his clothes were rusty, but the barrel of his rifle was as bright as his eye. He had heard them coming long before the signal, and from his position behind the tree had "a bead" upon them all the time.

"Hello there," cried the sentinel. "Durned if you ain't got Dad's horse. He 'll be mighty glad to see it again. And what else have you got there?"

"Young feller says he 's a war correspondent, but we caught him riding the old man's horse, and I reckon the burden 'll be on him to prove he 's all right."

"Well, Dad 's pretty riled, that 's all I can say."

Five minutes later they came to a small clearing in the woods. The smoke from a camp-fire curled lazily through the trees, and the fragrant odor of fried pork assailed Chesterfield's nostrils pleasantly.

His captors stopped him while they repeated the catbird's cry. At the command "Advance!" they joined a circle of a dozen stalwart young fellows, lying about the fire eating, and talking in low tones. At the side of each man lay the inevitable rifle.

"Well, Dad, we 've brought your hoss home again," said one of the newcomers quietly.

"Good for you, Hen," was the rejoinder, as Dad sprang to his feet with the agility of a boy; "and what the dickens are you doing with this man?" he exclaimed, hitting Chesterfield a backhander on the chest. The last time I saw him was in Kansas."

"Williamson," said the latter, "your friends were not sure whether to shoot me for a rebel guerrilla or hang me as a horse thief, so they decided to let you pass sentence upon me."

"Dad" Williamson laughed deeply. "Boys," he cried, "this gentleman is Ben Chesterfield from St. Louis. He 's a friend of mine. Chesterfield, these are my boys," and the Union scout waved his hand around the circle. "These are my youngsters. They are a worthless lot," he continued, looking about him affectionately. "They can't do very much except fight and get killed; but they

can shoot straight, Chesterfield, and they 're true blue, and you can just tie to any one of them."

The "youngsters," bearded men all of them, stretched their sturdy limbs before the fire in appreciation of their chief's compliment.

Five years before, Chesterfield had passed a winter evening with Williamson before a blazing camp-fire. The two men had taken to each other at that time; and although the intervening years had never brought them together, they now sat down side by side on a log, to share a piece of brown fat pork like two old friends.

Daniel Williamson, "Dad," or the "old man," as he was called by those who knew him, was about thirty-five, with a beard as black as a raven's wing. Chesterfield rarely met a man larger than himself, but "Dad" Williamson, broader of shoulder and deeper of chest, could look over the big correspondent's head.

Living over the border in Kentucky, Williamson had been one of those who had fought for the "Union" even before the war. They had saved their State from the South; yet when the war broke out the country where Williamson lived was as much divided in sentiment as it was before. "Dad" took his rifle from the wall, called a number of his own ilk about him, and together they carried on a warfare of their own. All through Kentucky and Tennessee they hunted and were hunted, turn and turn about, now chasing a band of rebel guerrillas through the woods, now piloting Federal

prisoners over the mountains, now fleeing from Morgan and his raiders. Pitted against men as reckless and fearless as themselves, they fought the war out in their own sweet way. Armed to the teeth, they never laid their weapons aside during day or night. Like the border riders of old, who "carved at the meal with gloves of steel and drank the red wine through the helmet barred," Williamson and his band slept in their boots with their rifles by their sides, and cut up their fried pork with their bowie-knives.

"This is the way we live, Chesterfield. Don't you want to join us? There ain't as much glory in it as writing glowing accounts of victories for the newspapers, but there 's lots more fun," and "Dad" Williamson laughed gleefully. His name was notorious in Richmond as a bushwhacker and Federal scout, and there was a price set upon his head. This fact added to the fun.

"Certainly I 'll join you," replied the correspondent, taking a large piece of pork on the end of a pointed stick. "I appreciate the fun much better now than I did earlier in the day when two of your 'youngsters' were threatening my poor brains."

"They took you for the rebel who stole my horse. Tell me where you came across the animal."

Chesterfield gave a detailed account of the incident. During the recital "Dad" Williamson's bright eyes snapped with suppressed excitement.

"Why in thunder, Chesterfield," he cried, as the latter finished, "did n't you hold the rascal?"

"You forget, I did not know whose horse it was, and I am a non-combatant."

"Non-combatant be blowed, Chesterfield; in cases of emergency you should never let that stand in your way. You 'll miss lots of fun and many an opportunity to do a service to your country."

"I never will again, Williamson, but I thought I was rather hard on the fellow, as it was, taking such a fine horse."

"Fine horse, I should say it was. You should have seen the slick way in which that rebel got away with him. I was a gum-headed sojer to let him do it. It riles me to think of it," and reaching down into his trousers' pocket Dad Williamson took out a small end of a tobacco plug, and solaced himself with a chew. "That 's all the tobacco there is in this camp," he said, with a sigh, as he offered half of it to Chesterfield. "What, you don't use it?" he continued wrapping the precious end in a piece of paper and putting it carefully away. "I feel mighty mean hanging on to this when all those boys have their hungry eyes on it, but it 's too small to be divided among 'em."

"That reminds me," exclaimed Chesterfield. "Where 's the saddle of your horse?"

"Henry, fetch that saddle over to Mr. Chesterfield."

"Thank you," said Chesterfield, feeling in the holsters. "Here is something you will like," and

he drew forth a large slab of Carolina plug neatly wrapped up in tinfoil.

"What," exclaimed Williamson, "you give this all to me?"

"Every ounce of it."

"Boys, see what my friend has done for us. Chesterfield, in the name of suffering humanity, I thank you. Now, boys, we 'll divide fair. I 'll take a bite first and pass the plug around in the order of seniority, — Bill next, Hen third."

Tearing away the tinfoil, "Dad" thrust the bar of tobacco into his capacious mouth and took a generous bite. His firm white teeth had hardly begun their work of mastication when he stopped, removed the quid from his mouth, and going up close to the fire examined it critically by the flickering light. His companions, who had crowded about him expectantly, viewed this action with surprise and some signs of alarm.

"What 's the matter?" faltered one burly follower with consternation written upon his face. "There ain't nothing wrong with the tobacco, is there, Dad?"

"The tobacco 's all right," answered Dad Williamson slowly.

There was a general sigh of relief.

"But there 's the all-firedest queer mixture in with it," and he carefully unrolled a piece of thin tissue paper which was embedded in the leaf of the plug. Spreading this out on his knee, he examined it intently with his keen eyes. "Hen, hold a

lighted pine-knot here, lad. I think there 's some writin' on this. Hold it a little nearer. Don't set fire to the blamed thing. That 's right." Dad Williamson's eyes snapped as he deciphered the small and delicately traced characters. He rose up from the fire bristling with excitement like a hunting-dog when he scents the quarry.

"Boys," he said quickly, "this is the best piece of luck yet. I 'm on the trace of the fellow that stole my hoss, and when I get him I 'll get something a darn sight better," and he chuckled to himself.

"What 's written on the paper, Dad?" inquired Bill.

"Wait a minute, boys, and let the old man think," replied Williamson, standing before the fire with his brows knitted and his great black beard on his chest. He kept perfectly still for thirty seconds. At the end of that time he slapped his thigh with decision.

"Bill Brown," he said, "I 'll leave you to look after the boys for the next few days. You know what to do. Join Wood at Wilson's Ford. I 'll try to be there by Thursday. Take all the boys with you, but don't let any more of 'em get killed than is absolutely necessary. Morgan's gang is about and they 're stronger than you are, so you 'd better keep away from 'em ; but if they should get up to you, I hope you 'll kill a few of them before they capture you."

"I reckon we 'll do our levelest, Dad."

"That 's all the instructions I can think of now," said Williamson. "Henry, saddle 'Starlight' and two of the other horses. I 'll take you and Mr. Chesterfield along with me. Hey, Chesterfield, what do you say? You 've only ridden forty miles to-day. You 're good for another twenty, I know."

Ben Chesterfield, never backward when there was any adventure on foot, acquiesced with alacrity.

"That 's splendid," exclaimed Williamson, who, gay as a lark, was buckling on his pistol belt.

"What arms are you going to take?" asked the non-combatant cheerfully.

"Oh, put a couple of six-shooters in your belt. Now be good boys till I see you again," Dad called out, as he swung into the saddle. "Come on, Benjamin," and the two big fellows rode off through the woods toward the highway, with Henry at their heels.

"It 's the richest of luck," explained Dad Williamson to the correspondent as they cantered along the road. "That letter was written by one of Bragg's scouts. It gives valuable information about our troops, which old Bragg would give his whiskers to receive," and Dad chuckled again.

"But where are we going?" inquired Chesterfield.

"The best of it is," Williamson went on to say, "that the letter ends up with: 'I shall await your reply before going down the river. Send instructions to the *same place*, and if I am away I will

arrange to have them reach me.' You remember where you held up this young fellow. Well, two miles farther up the road is the house of one William Todd. I have suspected him for some time as being up to some cute business, although he always shouts with the largest crowd. I 'll bet a plug of tobacco to a brass buckle that his house is the '*same place.*' And we 'll find the messenger there who was to have carried this message to Bragg. He won't carry it, but if we 're spry, we 'll get him, and somebody else will carry some sort of a message and maybe pick up some little crumbs of information in return. That 's the reason I took Henry."

"Rather dangerous for Henry, is n 't it?" asked Chesterfield, with a side glance at the quiet face of that young man.

"Well, I reckon so," answered Henry, speaking for himself, "but we 've all got kinder used to these things now."

Dad Williamson cantered a few lengths ahead, and called out in a warning tone: "We come to a stream here. Take the ford carefully, for the water is high." Chesterfield went in after him, and spurring through the foaming stream got safely across. Just as he emerged from the water on the opposite bank, a roll of thunder greeted his ear, while a fork of lightning flashed across the heavens.

"We 'll get that a little later," he muttered, looking up at the threatening sky.

CHAPTER XI

CHESTERFIELD'S CAPTIVE

An hour later the three men dismounted at a short distance from a large house. The wind was blowing heavily; fierce gusts whirling from all points of the compass at once, swaying the tree-tops madly and tossing their branches in all directions; howling around the house, and making the hinges of a dilapidated barn door creak frantically. The horses cowered before the gale, and even the stout-hearted Henry bent his head as he stood holding his horse by the bridle.

"That 's Todd's house," said Dad Williamson. "Now do you mind running a little risk, Chesterfield?"

"I'm a non-combatant," replied Benjamin, "but I don't mind getting into a scrimmage if it can't be avoided. What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to go right into the house."

Chesterfield took out a six-shooter from his belt, tossed the bridle of his horse to Henry, and prepared himself for the attack.

"Not that way," said Dad, laying a restraining hand upon his arm. "You can put up your shooting-iron for a while and listen to my project,

although I say beforehand I may be all off in my calculations. But if I am right, and Todd's house is the place of meeting of these Confederate spies, then one of them at least is likely to be here now. That 's the young feller that allowed himself the privilege of riding my horse."

"But he will recognize me if I go in there."

"Of course he will, and he 'll want to get the horse back, won't he? Because it's a mighty fine animal, and he probably got into the habit of thinking it was his. Now, according to my idea there 's two of these fellows. If they 're both inside, well and good. You give the signal; Hen and I 'll come in and bag them. But if the second fellow is n 't there, if he 's expected and comes up this road to-night; Hen and I, on the lookout outside the house, will have him sure. It is n 't likely anyone will get in or out of that house without our taking him."

Chesterfield acquiesced.

"Now we 'll reconnoitre a bit," said Williamson. "Hen, tie the horses as much in the shelter of those bushes as you can; it looks as if we might have a storm to-night." Even as he spoke great drops of rain began to fall. The two large men stole silently forward. They found the barn to be a large ramshackle building, one part lacking a roof, and the other full of cracks and crevices. Williamson cautiously opened the door, which swung on one hinge. As he did so, a yellow cur ran, yelping, to cower under a wagon in the corner,

and a horse poked his nose over the manger with a whinny. The noise of the tempest drowned all minor sounds, so there was little fear of alarming the house.

"Whoever rode this horse has been in the house some little time, for the creature is perfectly dry and as clean as a bone," said Chesterfield, running his hand along the animal's flank.

"He 's a different breed from those two nags in the end stalls; they 're poor cattle," said Williamson. "Look at this saddle. It 's fine and new, while all the others are worn-out things. One of our gentlemen is in that house, Chesterfield, as sure as fighting."

"Probably both of them are," replied the correspondent, "for the one I held up doubtless had to come on foot."

"You 're likely more than half right. I 'll leave you to go in and find out. If there 's only one besides Todd, tap once on the pane of the kitchen window; if you find there are two, tap a second time. Either Hen or I will hear you, and we 'll round 'em up in no time."

"I understand perfectly," replied Chesterfield.

"One thing more," whispered Dad: "we must capture all their papers; don't let them get a chance to hide or destroy them."

"I understand."

"All right, now go ahead," said Dad Williamson, placing himself where he could command the house door and the road.

Silently and quickly, Chesterfield walked towards the house. A single light showed from one of the lower windows ; the rest of the building was clothed in darkness. Chesterfield laid his hand upon the latch. He expected to find the door bolted, but to his surprise it yielded to the pressure, and he entered the room.

A man with dark matted hair, and face red with exposure to the sun and wind, half rose from his seat at table with an exclamation ; an older man by the fire let a plate of food, which he had been preparing, fall to the floor.

" Darn it," he said, " how you startled me ! Who are you, and what do you want ? "

" What would any man want on a night like this but a chance to dry himself by the fire ? " replied the correspondent, shaking the rain from his hat.

The man at the table had regained his self-possession instantly. " Well, don't stand with the door open, but come up to the fire." Both he and Chesterfield, with affected unconcern, had been eying each other like two wary dogs, each taking the other's measure.

" You 're not the man I expected to find," thought Chesterfield, as he took up his station in front of the grateful blaze, removed his coat, and hung it over the back of a chair. The man at the table resumed his meal. He had a heavy jaw made black with a three days' growth of beard ; from out his deep-set eyes he continued to watch the newcomer closely, his suspicions, always alert, aroused to a high pitch.

Meanwhile the correspondent stood jauntily in front of the fire, a smile lighting up his countenance, while his wet clothing steamed vigorously.

"Would you have any objection," he said pleasantly, "to my joining you at supper? I 've brought in a devouring appetite out of the storm."

"I 've no objection, if Todd will give it to you," was the reply.

"Will you be so good, Mr. Todd?" asked Chesterfield, without more ado taking a seat at the end of the table where he could command a view of the whole room.

"No, I ain't got no supper for you," was the gruff rejoinder.

"I 'll pay you for it," answered Chesterfield pleasantly, taking a copper cent from his pocket and snapping it against the window-pane.

"What was that?" exclaimed the man at the other end of the table, rising from his seat.

"Perhaps it 's the storm," said Chesterfield.

"It sounded like some one tapping on the glass," replied the other going to the window. A vivid flash of lightning greeted him, following it came a crash of thunder. "It 's not a fit night for even a dog to be out," he muttered, resuming his seat at the table.

"Stranger," he said aloud, with a show of affability, "as we seem destined to pass the evening together it might be agreeable to know a little more about each other. My name is Markley. When the war broke out — I did n't enlist" —

this with a laugh and shrug — "but I suppose you did."

"Well, Mr. Markley, in disordered times like these, when it is impossible to tell friend from foe, it behooves us to deal frankly with one another. I am a correspondent for a St. Louis newspaper."

Chesterfield, in telling the exact truth, hardly expected to be believed, and he saw the expression of doubt on Markley's face. The correspondent arose, got his coat from the back of the chair, and slipped it on. As he did so a package of letters fell from the pocket. He picked them up and thrust them carelessly back, apparently unconscious that the other man eyed them with greedy curiosity.

Markley shifted his feet uneasily. He more than mistrusted this huge stranger who had appeared so suddenly and unexpectedly out of the storm. He suspected him as an enemy. He longed to take possession of the package he had seen.

For the twentieth time he measured Chesterfield with his eye. It would be folly to try to overcome such an antagonist single-handed. Markley did not lack courage, but he also possessed discretion. Todd could be of no aid. He must get assistance elsewhere. He knew where to seek it, but it would necessitate a half-mile ride in the storm. He looked across the table at Chesterfield, who was contentedly smoking his pipe. Markley arose from his seat. "I 'm going to the stable to look after my horse, Todd."

Chesterfield did not move, and Markley went

out of the door, and running with his head down before the pelting rain made for the barn.

"The devil himself must be about to-night," he muttered, as a deafening crash of thunder seemed to shake the earth.

A pair of long arms encircled him, and he felt himself held as if in the hug of a grizzly bear, while his arms were fastened behind.

"Bring the lantern here, Hen," said a voice.

Markley knew that he was caught in a trap. Resistance was useless. "What do you want with me?" he asked huskily.

"I 'm going to take you a prisoner. Hen! bring up the horses."

"I reckon I 'll go quietly enough, but I only ask one thing, stranger."

"What is it?"

"Unloose my hand so I can get a chew of tobacco."

Dad Williamson hung the lantern upon a nail, carefully removed the revolver from the man's belt, and then untied one of his hands.

"Thank you," he replied gratefully, reaching for the plug, and taking what seemed a refreshing bite.

"I forgot," exclaimed Dad Williamson, suddenly seizing his prisoner's cheek between his thumb and finger. "Let me have that!" He forced the man's mouth open and took out a small wad of paper. "I almost lost this through my carelessness," said Dad Williamson, unrolling it and holding it to the light.

"You're too all-fired smart," exclaimed the prisoner, with an oath.

Dan chuckled. "Hen, have you got the horses?"

Meanwhile Chesterfield, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, addressed Todd urbanely. "Mr. Todd, I'm waiting for a piece of that succulent fried chicken."

"I haven't any chicken for you. I don't keep a hotel."

"Todd," asked Chesterfield suddenly, "who is upstairs?"

Todd was startled. He opened his mouth, but the reply faltered on his lips.

"Don't tell me I did not hear some one walking above our heads," said Chesterfield, "because the boards are loose and they squeak."

"Perhaps it was the rats," suggested Todd.

"No, it was not rats," replied Chesterfield firmly.

"It must have been my daughter, then," said Todd in a deprecatory tone.

"I thought you were a bachelor."

"A widower, sir."

"Are those your daughter's boots, Mr. Todd?" inquired Chesterfield pointing to a corner near the fire. They were gentlemen's riding-boots of the finest make, and of small proportions. The man who owned them must have been a dapper youth, and somewhat vain of his small feet. The boots were splashed with mud and water.

"Those are my son's boots."

"Is your son in the house?"

"No, he is away from home."

"But the boots are wet, Mr. Todd."

"So they are, so they are. My daughter must have been wearing them."

"I should like to see the young lady," said Chesterfield with animation, rising suddenly from the table.

Todd placed himself in front of the door which opened on the stairs. "Will you not respect the sanctity of my home?"

"But I was so certain that you were a bachelor, Todd."

"No, sir, a wid" —

Chesterfield had gently lifted him from his feet and put him away from the door. "I really must see this mysterious daughter of yours," with his hand upon the latch.

Todd caught the correspondent by the sleeve, and held on with a tenacity surprising for one of his years. Chesterfield disengaged himself from the old man's grasp.

"A most remarkable and interesting daughter, Todd," he exclaimed, and dashed up the stairway.

The weak-kneed Todd hesitated a moment, then fled from the house, exclaiming to himself, "I reckon I 'm safer away out of this."

On the landing at the head of the stairs were three doors. Chesterfield tried to open the one which he knew must lead to the room over the kitchen; but as he expected he found it locked. He threw himself against it with his full weight,

broke through with a crash, and fell headlong in a room of darkness. A peal of thunder shook the whole house at the same instant, and a vivid flash of lightning revealed to him a long garret half filled with worn-out and discarded pieces of furniture. In the middle of the room, from behind a pile of boxes, a figure rose to its feet and a pistol was fired point blank at Chesterfield. The bullet flew wide of its mark. In the pitchy darkness that followed the lightning's flash Chesterfield leaped forward. The storm was raging furiously outside, with peal upon peal of thunder. The lightning flashed at intervals of a few seconds, changing the scene from dark to light with blinding rapidity. In the next flash Chesterfield saw the figure disappear through an open window. He was after it in a trice. A ladder was against the house under the window, but without hesitating the tall Chesterfield swung from the sill to the ground just in time to receive plump in his arms the person who had sprung from the ladder.

"I 've got you tight, my little" — he began, then stopped with an exclamation of surprise, for he held a woman in his arms, and she fought him valiantly. "Softly," he said in response to a stinging blow on the side of the head. "You *are* active. Let me hold your hands. Now the other paw, kitty. Don't scratch."

She did not cry out, but reserving all her breath and strength, struggled splendidly, bending her supple body this way and that, striking at him

like a fierce young tiger-cat. In the flare of the lightning he could see a mass of dark hair and a pair of eyes that blazed at him fiercely. He captured both her hands in one of his and held her so she could move neither hand nor foot. She felt her utter helplessness, and ceased to struggle. She did not cry and call him coward, but panted out with all the breath that remained to her: "Now that the man you were after has got away, don't you think you had better let me go?"

"Is n't that asking a good deal, seeing I 've had so much trouble to catch you?"

"But how long are you going to hold me like this? It 's very unpleasant for me."

"While I ponder this matter over. It is very unpleasant for me to think how you have tried to thwart me."

"I 'm very sorry," and she gave a little low laugh. "Won't you please let me go?"

"If you promise not to show any more fight."

"I promise not to — for the present," she replied. "You see I 'm not a match for you."

Chesterfield partially released her, but still kept his hand upon her arm.

"Are you afraid I 'll run away?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I 'll promise you I won't."

Chesterfield's only reply was, "Come with me into the house; I want to talk with you."

Taking her by the arm, he led the way toward the kitchen door. She offered no resistance, but went meekly with him.

The fire burned low on the hearth. Chesterfield threw in a few large sticks and had a blaze roaring up the chimney. Seating himself on a bench beside it, he held his prisoner off at arms' length, much as one might hold a naughty child, and looked into her face long and steadily.

She returned his gaze unflinchingly. Her dark hair, which in the struggle had become loosened, lay in rich disorder about her shoulders and over a bosom which rose and fell with suppressed excitement. Her breath came rather quickly through her parted lips, and a little smile hovered in the corners of her mouth, and was reflected in her eyes with a half-saucy, half-mischievous expression. She was a woman who possessed the power of beauty; glowing, radiant, ardent beauty, and she was fully conscious of her power.

Chesterfield gave a long low whistle. "I have seen you before," he said.

She made no reply.

"You had on boots and trousers," he continued slowly, "and you certainly wore them as if to the manner born; and now I think you had better give an account of yourself."

She tossed her head back quickly. "Why should I give an account of myself to you, sir?"

"Because I demand it."

"You demand it, and by what right, may I ask?" and her eyes flashed at him indignantly.

"By the right of might. You are in my power, so you had better answer my questions at once and truthfully."

A flush deepened on her warm cheek as she looked into the cool gray eyes that seemed to read her so searchingly; a feeling of uneasiness took possession of her; for almost the first time in her life she was at a loss for words.

"You are not polite," she said.

"No," replied Chesterfield coldly, "I am not polite, but I am curious and you must satisfy my curiosity upon the following points: Who was that man with Todd downstairs? who are you? and what were you both doing in the house of this man Todd, whom I know to be a double-faced fellow?"

"And if I refuse to satisfy your curiosity," she answered pertly.

"Then you shall have an opportunity to satisfy the curiosity of the Federal commander at Memphis, for I shall take you there."

"I will not deny," she went on with a burst of frankness, "that he is an officer in the Confederate army, and that he came here to see me at my uncle's, Mr. William Todd. The gentleman is not upon furlough, and his interview with me was stolen. Your coming annoyed him and it annoyed me."

"Is that the reason you tried to shoot me in the garret?" She did not reply at once, and Chesterfield took up her hand. It was a strong, firm hand, a little brown from exposure to the sun. "That is the hand which pointed a revolver at my head a few minutes ago. So I annoyed you and you tried to kill me," he continued coolly.

"I thought you wanted to harm him," and the dark lashes veiled the eyes for a moment.

"Was he afraid?"

"We are none of us afraid," and she looked up at him proudly.

Chesterfield looked searchingly into her face as he said calmly, "That man is not your suitor. Todd is not your uncle, and I don't believe a word of your story."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I 'm sure it does not make any difference to me."

"But," said Chesterfield, "there is a certain young woman who has had an active career, who has caused much consternation, cutting a wide swath in and outside of the Union lines."

"I do not understand you. Of what are you accusing *me?*"

"Of nothing," replied Chesterfield, "but I shall have to take you where those who have had the pleasure of knowing that agreeable young person can have an opportunity to recognize her."

Throughout most of the interview the girl had maintained her composure, meeting Chesterfield's searching inquiry with the assurance of one who feels secure of her position. At these words, spoken with great deliberation, she trembled slightly as if from excitement or fear. When he had finished she hesitated for a moment, as if debating in her mind just what course to pursue. When she did speak, it was in a quiet and submissive tone of voice.

"I do not quite understand you yet, but I do understand that you threaten to carry me away, under the impression that I am some one else. Who is this young woman in question — anybody very bad?"

"She is a Confederate spy; beautiful, accomplished, clever, and witty, and she has played the very old Ned in more ways than one."

The girl broke into a melodious laugh. "How absurd, how preposterous! And you think that I am this creature, — this beautiful, accomplished, witty, clever incarnation of wickedness. Really, sir, I don't know whether I should feel flattered at the compliment," — here she dropped him a curtsy — "or whether I should consider myself insulted," and she drew herself up, "and be angry at you for being so — stupid."

Chesterfield made no direct answer, but stepping forward said, "We must start now."

"Do you actually mean to drag me out in the night, in this weather, twenty-five or thirty miles through mud and rain?"

"You will have to go with me," replied Chesterfield placidly.

"It is too absurd, too preposterously out of all reason!" she exclaimed, walking up and down the room excitedly.

Chesterfield stood calmly by and watched her.

She stopped in front of him, and looking up into his face said in a low voice, "And if this woman, of whom you speak so strangely, were caught and

taken to the Union army, what would be done with her?"

"I am afraid it will fare ill with Flora Dowd when she is captured."

"Flora Dowd?" she repeated inquiringly.

"Yes, that is her name."

"That is not *my* name."

"So much the better for you," replied Chesterfield.

"Then you will not take *me*," she murmured, looking at him pleadingly.

"Yes, I shall."

"I am not she. Pray do not force me to go with you!" the young woman cried again.

"If you are not she, why do you fear to go?" he asked quietly.

"The disgrace of it," she flared out. "Cannot you understand the feeling of shame and disgrace at being haled before a lot of rude men? To be catechised, browbeaten, bullied, and insulted! Oh, the shame of it!" and she covered her face with her hands.

Chesterfield watched her without apparent emotion. "Believe me, you will not be insulted. You will be shown all possible consideration."

She took her hands away suddenly. Her lashes were moist, and there was a catch in her voice as she said: "I am sure you will treat me with respect. A man like you, large, strong, brave, must be generous and noble. I appeal to your generosity — I trust to your nobility."

Chesterfield bowed.

"And you will not force me to go with you?" she inquired eagerly.

"I regret it, but you must go," was the reply in the same tranquil manner.

"I will not," she cried out, clinching her hands and looking at him defiantly. "You shall not force me."

His only reply was to step forward and lift her from the floor. She struggled fiercely, her supple body twisting and turning in his arms, while she cried out to him, pleaded with him in alternate tones of command and entreaty to set her down upon her feet.

Out of the door he walked, towards the barn, carrying the struggling woman in his arms. With one hand which she had managed to get free she beat him violently about the head, so violently that the hand was bruised and bleeding, but he minded the blows no more than the rain that fell down upon his head.

"By George," cried the voice of Dad Williamson, "what have you got there?"

"The other fellow," answered Chesterfield, reaching for his horse's bridle.

"Darned if it is n't a woman."

"If you have any manhood left in you I pray that you let me go," she cried.

"Williamson," said Chesterfield, "this is the person who was riding your horse. Furthermore, I have many reasons to think that this young

woman is a Confederate spy, who, as Grant says, has caused more havoc than a troop of horse; but I leave the matter for you to decide. Shall I let her go?"

"I should say *not*, Chesterfield. Now we've captured the pair of 'em. If the filly runs in that kind of a double team she will have to take the consequences."

"Oh, do not do as he says, Mr. Chesterfield; I appeal to you once more," cried the girl.

Chesterfield made no reply, but mounted his horse, and drew her to the saddle in front of him.

"All ready, Hen?" inquired Williamson.

"All ready, Dad!"

At the word from Williamson they set off down the road, Williamson riding ahead, Henry with his prisoner's horse tied to his own, and Chesterfield and his charge bringing up the rear.

Splashing through mud and water down the road they went. Deaf to all her entreaties, unmindful of her struggles, Chesterfield held the woman tightly on the saddle as they rode through the storm.

At last, completely exhausted, the girl lay still, the wild wind blowing her hair and the rain beating into her hot face. Chesterfield disengaged his own riding-cloak, and wrapped it around her. Thus they made their way through the night. Not a word was spoken. At the end of an hour's time he parted the folds of the cloak which encircled her face and looked down into it. Worn out by exertion and fruitless struggle, she lay quietly. He studied the face long and carefully.

CHAPTER XII

A LETTER FROM THE FRONT

MILLIKEN'S BEND, April —, 1863.

MY DEAR LITTLE COMRADE, — As much as I long to see your sweet face, I hope you will not get the appointment as field nurse. I could not bear to think of you as being exposed to the privations and dangers which such a life would entail. There are many stronger women for this work, and you are better fitted for the work you are doing in Washington. There is so much sickness in this frightful climate, — the chances are that you would be taken ill yourself. When I come to Washington after the war, I want to find you looking just the same as when I last saw you. I want to see that color in your cheek. I want to see the same brightness in your eyes. Keep those eyes bright, for the sake of — your father, your brother, and all those who care for you.

I think I am unselfish, after a fashion, — in writing you thus, for if you did come out I might get an opportunity to see you, and that would give me great happiness. However, until the war is over, I must be consoled with your letters. Remember how much they are to me. I never see

your delicate handwriting upon an envelope without a leap of the heart. I have not received a letter from you for a long time. Can it be that you have forgotten me? Perhaps you have written and the letter has gone astray. I hope you have written, although it makes me wild to think that possibly your little letter has missed its mark and fallen into other hands. If it has gone astray, will you not write again?

The army is deep in the problem of taking Vicksburg, and we all are much of the time waist deep in mud and water. Many a poor fellow is sick with fever; but luckily for me, I have so far escaped. I have just been ordered up the river to Memphis, to bring down some supplies on a transport. I am delighted at the thought of a change, for I was never made for a water-rat or a beaver. I start at once on the steamer River Queen. I cannot say exactly when I shall return, but when I do get back, the first thing I shall look for will be an envelope bearing your familiar and prized handwriting, — and wherever I may be, afloat or ashore, I think of you, and am

Your devoted,

GORDON CLAYBORNE.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PRISONER ON THE RIVER QUEEN

Captain Clayborne had been sent up the river to Memphis, to bring down a transport laden with supplies for the soldiers and fodder for the animals.

On a wet April morning, bent on hastening the hour of departure, he rode down to the wharf where the River Queen was taking aboard her cargo. As Clayborne stood watching the men roll up the barrels of pork, bacon, flour, and salt, and pile the decks high with bales of hay and bags of grain, Benjamin Chesterfield came down on the dock in company with the black-bearded scout, Dad Williamson. "Good morning, captain," said the newspaper correspondent cheerfully, "have you the command of this expedition?"

"Yes, I am going to take some supplies down the river."

"Well, we have come to add to your cargo."

"In what way?"

"Williamson has two rebel spies on his hands. He has made quite an important capture, and has been instructed to send them down the river for examination."

"Very good; Lieutenant Brainard here will take charge of them. Brainard, will you please see that the two prisoners are safely stored away with the rest of the freight?"

"One of them is named Markley, and the other and the most important one is a woman, Flora Dowd," said Chesterfield, "and I warn you, Captain, that she is as clever a piece of womankind as you have ever seen."

"Brainard, put your fair prisoner in one of the staterooms on the main deck," said Clayborne. "Shall we put a double guard over her, Chesterfield?" he added laughingly.

"Yes, if you want to keep her safely."

"You hear that, Lieutenant, you 've got to be vigilant. Now please get your prisoners aboard as soon as possible, for I want to start almost immediately."

"Very well, sir," replied the lieutenant, as he walked off with the scout.

"Chesterfield, are you going down with us?" inquired Gordon.

"I 'm coming down on the Huntress in a few days."

"Well, good-day until we meet again," and Clayborne went up the gang-plank.

A young second lieutenant with highly polished buttons on his coat came running up the gang-plank after him.

"Captain Clayborne," he called out, "I have instructions to report to you and go down the river on the Queen. When do you start?"

"Oh, Lieutenant Ware," replied Clayborne cordially, "I 'm glad to see you. Come aboard; we shall start at once."

Half an hour later the boat was puffing down the Mississippi River. Lieutenant Francis Ware was happy in the thought that he had at last been relieved from garrison duty and was really going to the front, with the prospect of immediate active service.

"Ware," said first lieutenant Brainard, coming up to him, "I shall be very much occupied with some accounts while we are going down the river. I shall have to ask you to take charge of two prisoners who are on board, one in a stateroom on the upper main deck, the other in a cabin below. You will please see that they have proper food and care, but keep a guard outside of their doors day and night."

"Very well, sir," was the reply.

Clayborne stood in the pilot-house by the side of the steamboat captain, watching the flat shores of the river as the River Queen, steamed slowly along. "What 's the matter with your boat, captain?" he demanded. "Can't she make better speed than this? Why, we are crawling along at not over six miles an hour."

"The fact is, sir," replied the steamboat captain, "the old craft is heavy laden and her boilers are not over strong."

"By Jove, we won't get to Milliken's Bend for three days. I counted on getting there in half that time."

"Can't help it, sir; we 'll be lucky to get there in three days."

There was nothing more to be said. The prospect was far from pleasant, and Gordon stood chewing the ends of his mustache in an impatient mood, when a corporal came up to him and placed a slip of paper in his hand. Gordon read it with a start.

"Who gave you this?" he demanded hastily.

"It is from one of the prisoners, sir. The woman, Flora Dowd, sir."

Gordon went to the main deck, followed by the corporal.

A sentry posted in front of a stateroom door saluted.

"Corporal, send for the officer in charge of the prisoners," said Gordon, walking up and down the deck restlessly.

In a few minutes Ware appeared.

Clayborne addressed him briefly with: "Give me the key to this door, Lieutenant. You may withdraw the guard until I return you the key later." With this he entered the room.

If the woman was in the least agitated at the sight of Captain Clayborne, she succeeded in concealing her emotion admirably.

"Gordon, when I learned that you were in command I took the liberty of sending for you," she said, as composed and tranquil as a summer's day.

Gordon stood and looked at her in silence. Her

riding-boots and the short-skirted dress were wet and splashed with mud, yet she carried herself with her accustomed graceful ease. Although during the night she had ridden for many hours through the storm, her color was as fresh and her eyes as bright as if she had just arisen from a refreshing sleep.

"Regina, what have you to do with Flora Dowd?" asked Gordon sternly.

"I am sometimes called Flora Dowd," she replied sweetly.

"Flora Dowd, the spy," he repeated slowly.

"That is what some persons say," she answered; "but I am Regina Bowie to you, Gordon," and she held out her hand to him.

He did not move.

"Won't you take it?" she asked quietly.

He took the hand, saying, "Regina, how is it possible that you, the proud and fastidious, could become a spy?"

She dropped his hand, crying out passionately: "What I have done is for a glorious and sacred cause. I am better and nobler for being known and reviled by the Yankees as Flora Dowd." Then with a swift transition of mood she said in her low, sweet voice: "But you and I can never be enemies, Gordon. Let me speak to you as I used to long ago — as a friend. Oh, Gordon, I need a friend — I need a friend."

The sob in the woman's voice touched him.

"Regina," he said, with an emotion which he

did not succeed in concealing from her, "what is my friendship worth to you? Do you not realize your position?"

"I do realize it," she replied quietly. "It is one of the strange mischances of life, but it is no more strange than my whole existence has been since we last saw each other. Won't you sit down, Gordon, and let me tell some of the things I have done?"

"You must tell me nothing," he said quietly. "I have never known that you were Flora Dowd. I only know you now as Regina Bowie."

"Oh, I forgot," she replied with equal quickness, "you are one of the enemy."

"You should remember it for your own sake, for if I am called to give testimony" —

"To give testimony" — she repeated, interrupting him. "Oh, of course you would have to repeat under oath all I had told you. How stupid of me not to have thought of that before. But, Gordon, you will let me talk to you of Clifford. I have seen him many times within the year. Surely you would like to talk about your brother and your father?"

"Yes," he answered with feeling, sitting down upon a camp chair. "Tell me everything you can about them."

When Gordon came back to the quarter-deck he found young Ware walking up and down studying a copy of army tactics, while from the deck below came the monotonous tones of a sergeant's voice as he drilled a squad of recruits.

"Ware," said Clayborne, "see that the prisoners are well cared for; let them want for nothing."

"They shall be well cared for, Captain. It seems impossible that such a refined woman could be a spy. I have often heard of the exploits of Flora Dowd. I had been told that she was handsome, but I never imagined she was so beautiful. I never imagined that the dare-devil Flora would turn out to be such a graceful and brilliant creature. What do you suppose"—

"Lieutenant Ware," interrupted Gordon with some impatience, "I don't suppose anything. I merely wanted to say to you that Miss Dowd, although a prisoner, is to be treated with the consideration due a lady."

"The caution is quite unnecessary, sir," replied the young man, with a stiff bow as he walked away.

Gordon wished to be alone and undisturbed, and he walked out to the bow of the vessel. His thoughts dwelt continually on Regina Bowie. Why in the name of all that was wonderful had it fallen to his lot to have charge of her as a prisoner? Her cry, "Oh, Gordon, I need a friend!" rang constantly in his ears.

All day Clayborne's face wore a look of careworn preoccupation. He spent most of his time walking the deck. Regina Bowie sent again to ask if he would not come to see her. Although such an interview was painful to him, he was unable to refuse. She was most subdued and gentle

in her manner; humility and submission became her wonderfully.

"Gordon, you surely are not afraid that I shall escape from this boat in mid-river; won't you let me out on deck to take the air?" This was not unreasonable, so he gave her the liberty of the quarter-deck. At her request he walked with her.

"Gordon, when do we come to our journey's end?" she inquired.

"In about three days."

"And then you deliver me over to my other jailers?" she asked quietly.

"Other jailers," he repeated, with a slight accent of reproach in his voice. "Have I treated you as if I were your jailer, Regina?"

"Forgive me, Gordon," she said quickly, "if I sometimes speak bitterly, but I cannot help feeling bitter every time I think that you are one of the foes of my country. It is that which hurts me more than any fear of what my fate will be."

"It is useless for us to try to discuss that matter, Regina," was Gordon's answer.

"I know it," she answered, with a sigh.

They walked the deck in silence for some time.

"Gordon," whispered Regina, stopping suddenly in her walk and looking up into his face, "what will they do with me? Will they hang me?" Her lips trembled a little as she spoke.

"No, Regina, they will not."

"But they hang spies, do they not?"

"Yes, but I do not think that they will hang a woman."

"And Markley?"

"If he is convicted of being a spy, he will undoubtedly be executed."

Regina Bowie shuddered. "You say they will not execute a woman, Gordon, and you believe it because you are a chivalrous man; but these Yankees will not spare me because I am a woman."

"Do not allow yourself to get into any fever of alarm, Regina. I cannot say what the decision of the court will be, but I feel certain that it would not condemn a woman to death. I do believe, however, that you will be kept in some restraint until the war is over."

"In restraint!" she repeated: "you mean in prison?"

"Yes."

"In some Northern prison?"

"Yes."

"I would rather die first!" she cried fiercely. "I would rather die a thousand times than be sent North to be kept in one of their vile prisons, to have the Northern women stare at me, to be pointed out as Flora Dowd, the female spy!"

Gordon stood looking at her with commiseration.

"I suppose they will send me to this prison without even a trial," she concluded bitterly.

"Why, of course you will have a trial. Both you and Markley will be tried according to military procedure."

"Oh, I could not bear to be dragged before a lot of men and have them sit in judgment on me. Oh, Gordon, be my friend, my real friend! Spare me that humiliation which is worse than death. Kill me before that time comes!"

"Regina, do not become excited. You are not a hysterical woman."

"But you will remain my friend through everything?"

"I am bound to stand by you, Regina; you need not ask that question again."

"Then if you are my friend — my true friend — you can never see me suffer the humiliation of a public trial." She looked into his face, speaking slowly. "You will set me free, Gordon."

"Do you know what you are asking?" he demanded. "You are asking me to violate my oath of duty in order to save you from the consequences of your rashness and folly."

"No, no, Gordon; I did not mean that."

"If I should permit you to escape I should be suspected of being your accomplice."

"My accomplice," she repeated softly to herself. Then laying her hand on his arm, "I understand, Gordon, but you have never quite understood *me*. You have always thought of me as a woman whose character had been cast in a strong mould. Because my spirit has been high you have always thought that I was courageous; but I am not brave, Gordon. You think that I am daring and fearless, and perhaps reckless, be-

cause I have ventured to enter the service in this war, but I fear many things, Gordon. I am afraid of being brought to trial as a spy. I am afraid of being shot. In spite of all you say, I am still afraid."

Tears stood in her dark eyes, and she stretched out her hand with a gesture that appealed for aid.

"Control yourself, Regina. Do not cry."

"No, Gordon, I will not cry," she answered with bowed head.

He stood in silence, looking at her for a few moments, then spoke with suppressed fervor: "You need have no fear. You shall not be shot. You shall not be brought to trial. You shall go free."

She lifted her face, the tears still standing wet upon the lashes, while she endeavored to speak in a calm voice of self-control.

"I cannot accept my life — or my liberty at the price of yours. No, Gordon, I have played the game of war with men. I must not meet the consequences like a weak woman."

"You begged me to set you free, and now that I offer you your liberty you refuse it. I say you shall go."

Never had she appeared more beautiful than at this moment when, looking up into his face, she said with a slight tremble of the lip, "I am only a woman, after all, Gordon."

He took the hand which rested on his arm, say-

ing: "You shall leave this boat in freedom. Whatever the consequences to me, I am resolved that you shall not suffer for your rashness."

"And what will become of you," she inquired, "if you let me escape?"

"Having made up my mind that you shall be liberated, I shall not think of the consequences until the time comes."

"But I cannot help thinking of them," she cried. "Perhaps they will shoot you."

"I think not."

"They will, Gordon, I know they will, and I refuse to go, Gordon. I absolutely refuse my liberty."

"You cannot refuse. I shall make you accept it."

"I refuse — I shall refuse unless" — she hesitated — "unless you go with me." Then with a burst of passionate entreaty she continued: "You do not belong here, you belong to us. Oh, come to us, Gordon. It is your duty. You have an opportunity to render your country a great service. Do not let it go unheeded. The past will be forgotten and forgiven" —

"Regina," he cried sternly, "I command you to be silent!"

Neither spoke for a few moments. Then turning her wondrous eyes up at him with a look of contrition she said humbly: "Forgive me, Gordon; I see I cannot move you. I see I offend you, but what I have just said is the truth. I

meant it for your good. Tell me that you are not angry with me."

"I am not angry."

"What are you going to do with me?"

"I am going to set you at liberty as soon as I can."

"And Markley, what becomes of him?" she inquired.

"If he is convicted, he will have to swing, I suppose," Gordon answered almost savagely. "You are the only one whose safety concerns me. You are in trouble and I am going to aid you, but you must make up your mind to obey me."

"Yes, Gordon," she replied, following him meekly.

CHAPTER XIV

A WOMAN IS AN AWKWARD PRISONER

Lieutenant Ware, having been ordered to take charge of the prisoners, was particularly mindful of the comfort of the woman captive, Flora Dowd. He felt compassion for her; he felt sure she could not be guilty of the charge against her, and it seemed to him a great hardship that she should be a prisoner.

She agreed with him, and told him many things which strengthened his conviction that she was a much abused young woman. There was a small window in her stateroom which looked out near the paddle-box. Regina Bowie, taking advantage of this loophole, found time and opportunity to tell Ware much about herself, which interested him and enlisted his sympathy. Regina was quick to respond to sympathy, and became more communicative, but she did not deem it expedient nor wise to tell him her real name, nor to mention her previous acquaintance with Gordon Clayborne.

It was pleasant to excite the interest and sympathy of the young lieutenant. Not only was it agreeable to have his good-will, but Regina had long since learned the value of making friends;

so the growing kindliness on the part of young Ware was not to be discouraged, and Regina did not discourage it.

On the afternoon of the third day the River Queen approached the landing at Milliken's Bend, the point of destination. Instead of the large army corps which Captain Clayborne had seen encamped there a week before, he found only a small detachment. The troops had been marched down the west bank of the river; the gunboats and transports had run the batteries of the enemy. The siege of Vicksburg had begun in earnest.

In the hurry of departure no orders had been left for the disposal of the supplies to be brought by the River Queen. The single road from Milliken's down to New Carthage and Hard Times was already choked with wagon-trains. To add to this confusion would incur the risk of having the supplies spoiled. Gordon debated the question carefully in his mind, then called the steamboat captain to one side.

"Captain Wilkins," he said, "of all the boats which have run the Vicksburg batteries nearly every one has got safely by, which proves that wooden vessels can run the batteries."

"That 's what I said two months ago when the Queen of the West went through. If that little wooden gunboat can run by, any good river boat ought to stand it."

"That 's what I think," replied Gordon, "and I propose to run the batteries with this boat."

"It can't be done, Captain Clayborne."

"Why not? You just said it could."

"I said any good boat ought to run the batteries, but this boat has got a weak boiler. Even if I pushed her she could not make over eight miles an hour, and we ought to run at least twelve to have any chance of getting by."

"Captain Wilkins, we shall have to try it, for I 've made up my mind to go through."

"Captain Clayborne, I tell you the rebel guns will knock this boat into chips once it gets within their range. You be guided by my advice."

"Have you ever run the batteries, Captain Wilkins?"

"No."

"Neither have I, so we can only make the experiment. I 'll wager many of those tugs with their barges did not make ten miles an hour. We 'll go on the River Queen if she only runs five."

"No, we won't, Captain Clayborne. I 'm perfectly willing to run the gauntlet with a fast boat, but I 'm durned if I 'm going to risk my old carcass on any such fool job as that. I own this boat, — the Government only hires her, — and I 'm not going to let the rebels have a chance to blow the River Queen out of the water."

"The River Queen is in my hands now, and she goes where I say," answered Gordon. "If she gets damaged, you 'll get your pay from the Government."

"You can't take her without the men to run her, and none of my men will be such fools as to put their heads into the lion's mouth," said Wilkins doggedly.

"Lieutenant Brainard," Gordon called out, "summon every soldier on board to the quarter-deck."

The lieutenant hesitated, then speaking in a shamefaced way said: "I will of course obey orders, Captain Clayborne, but I consider it my duty to add my remonstrances to those of Wilkins. I think the attempt will be foolhardy."

"Summon the men," commanded Clayborne peremptorily.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Captain Wilkins.

"Wait and see," replied Gordon shortly.

"Captain Clayborne, you can't coerce me or my men into putting our lives in jeopardy. I'm willing to take any ordinary risk. Give me a boat that 'll run twelve or fifteen miles an hour, and I 'll put her through."

"What 's the use of talking like that, Wilkins? You know there is n't a good boat above Vicksburg at our disposal. It 's either take the River Queen or leave her. I'm going to take her. Boys," Clayborne continued, addressing the men drawn up on the quarter-deck, "the River Queen is going to run the Vicksburg batteries to-night. Captain Wilkins and his men do not think it a safe undertaking. As many of you as are famil-

iar with river navigation step forward from the ranks."

Ten men stepped promptly out of the line.

"You men are from Ohio, brought up along the Ohio River, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," replied a number of voices.

"Who will volunteer to run the engine?"

Half a dozen men answered that they would.

"Who feels able to steer the boat?"

"I'm willing to try, Captain," drawled a lank Ohioan with a freckled, weather-stained face. "I took a boat down to New Orleans once."

"You fully understand that it will be a difficult matter to stand up there in the pilot-house as a target for the Confederate guns," said Clayborne.

"I allow they won't scare me if they don't hit me," was the reply.

"Very good," continued Clayborne; "I only want to impress you with the great responsibility which will rest on your shoulders. Now will any one else be ready to take a hand at the wheel in case of accident to you?"

"If you'll let me pick my mate," said the volunteer pilot, "Bob Perkins is as good as any man on the river."

"Very good," answered Gordon. "Get to your posts at once. Now, Captain Wilkins, we'll put you and any of your men who wish it ashore at Milliken's."

"No, by gosh, you won't," replied the steamboat captain emphatically. "This is my boat and

I 'll stick to her. If you 're such an all-fired reckless cuss as to run her into hell's teeth, I 'm going to be at the helm myself. I reckon there ain't any of those chaps that have navigated the Ohio who know this Mississippi better 'n Dan Wilkins. I 'll put you fellows through or I 'll go to the bottom with you. Boys," he cried to his boat's crew, "I did n't hire you to run rebel batteries in a tub. Any one of you is at liberty to get off here at the Bend ; but as for me, all I can say is Dan Wilkins ain't going to allow any soldiers to stump him on the river."

Not a man stirred.

" I guess we 'll take this trip as a happy family, Captain Clayborne," said Wilkins.

Gordon smiled. " Very well, Captain Wilkins, we will leave the navigation of the boat to you. If you want any assistance from any of my men, call upon me."

" I 'll want your men when mine are shot out of their places, but if we go, we 'll all go pretty much together. Jim Coles, carry some of those barrels of pork down into the engine-room for fuel. Whatever we do, Captain Clayborne, we 've got to make some sort of speed ; and if we do go to the bottom, it may not be the rebel guns that send us there, for the old Queen is liable to blow out her own boiler."

" We shall have to take that risk, Captain Wilkins, but you need not increase speed until nightfall, for we don't want to get opposite the batteries

before midnight, and if we get through we 'll be at Hard Times by daylight."

"If we don't get through we 'll be in 'hard times' many hours before daylight, and I calculate some of us will stay there, too;" and Captain Wilkins went down into the engine-room to oil and polish up the old machinery. Here, as he worked away cheerfully, he could be heard whistling to himself the rather suggestive air, "Down among the Dead Men."

At Milliken's Bend Captain Clayborne debarked all of the horses, and unloaded enough of the supplies to perceptibly lighten the boat, and then waited for darkness.

As evening descended the River Queen began to get up steam for that supreme test of her powers, — a flying trip past the batteries of Vicksburg, which lay yawning but not sleeping twenty-five miles below. This was to be no pleasure trip for the old craft, although Captain Wilkins had put her in her finest trim. He had oiled her engines and polished the brasses until they shone like new. He had rolled barrels of pork into the furnace-room, and protected "her vitals" with bales of cotton. He was going to put her through or "bust."

Clayborne stood in the stern of the vessel behind a deck-house, looking down into the dark waters of the Mississippi. Regina Bowie, who availed freely of the liberty of the deck which had been granted her, came to his side.

"Gordon," she whispered, "what are you going to do?"

"I am going to run the batteries."

"You will never be able to do it with this craft."

"Then we shall fall into the hands of the Confederates or go to the bottom; but other vessels have got safely through and I think we shall." He looked at the sky as he spoke. The night was settling dark. The heavens were overcast and black, save where an occasional rift in the clouds disclosed the light of a vagrant star.

"In this slow decrepit boat all the chances are against you, Gordon," Regina repeated quietly. "In your heart you know that I speak the truth. It is only your Clayborne pride which prevents your acknowledging it. It is only your Clayborne pride which prevents your leaving this vessel at the Bend. Rather than have it hinted that you were afraid to follow where others have gone, you risk your life, the lives of your men; you place in jeopardy the lives of your prisoners."

"That the venture is dangerous I know," replied Gordon, "but it is not the forlorn hope you picture it, and I have thought of my prisoners. I am going to put you ashore here at the Bend; as for Markley, he is a man; he must take the risk with the other men."

"You were always chivalrous, Gordon; and so you would set me free because I am a woman."

He took a few rapid paces up and down the

deck before he answered her, then, speaking quickly, "Before we start it will be pitch dark. I shall then put you on shore. You shall have your liberty because you are a woman."

She looked into his face searchingly. She liked the man's generosity. She admired his strength. She felt her own power over him, and it thrilled her. Dearer than the thought of life or liberty was the desire to bring him back with her.

"And I refuse because I am a woman," she answered.

"You cannot refuse, for I shall make you go," he replied with equal determination.

"You will make me go!" she cried with a thrill of emotion in her voice; then laying her hand upon his arm, she spoke earnestly. "If you persist in your rashness you will run this boat to certain destruction. Be guided by reason, Gordon. Allow Markley to go free also; do not drag that poor fellow into a danger he has no choice of avoiding."

"I have told you he must take his chances with the rest of us."

"Then I shall not go without him."

"You will have to go, Regina."

"Do you think so poorly of me as to suppose I would desert a comrade? As much as I fear it, I would rather share the fate which awaits him."

They had been speaking in low tones, but she stamped her heel upon the deck in emphasis. Gordon looked at her with admiration.

"Let us all go, Gordon," she whispered imploringly. "Do not you remain to pay the penalty for having been magnanimous. Come with us. Do not fear; you shall not be a prisoner. A few words from me, and all will be set right. It seems to me as if I had been ordained to bring you back to the right path. The moment has now come. There is a small boat here in the stern. You can release Markley in a moment. A few strokes of the oar" —

Gordon was silent.

"Does it seem such a hard thing for you to do? Will you not follow me now if I show the way?"

She took a step forward. Her foot tripped upon a coil of rope; she would have fallen to the deck had not Gordon caught her in his arms. He supported her thus for an instant.

"I need you more than ever, Gordon. I cannot give you up," she said.

Her head rested on his shoulder, and thus he held her for a moment while she whispered in that low sweet tone to which he had never listened without being deeply stirred, "What men call honor is often an empty title, Gordon. If our positions were reversed — if you were in need of my help, I would make a great sacrifice for your sake; that is the woman's way."

With pulse beating high and his warm blood surging through his veins, Gordon held the woman at arm's length and looked searchingly into her face. There was a tender light in her dark eyes,

her pretty mouth wore an appealing expression. What man could have looked into that fascinating face and not been deeply moved? As the man looked at her, endeavoring to read her thoughts, his whole nature stirred by the magic of her wonderful influence, the sharp tones of Captain Wilkins's voice giving the final orders to cast off, came to him from the bridge. "Throw off that rope, Jack. You may never cast another. A few hours more and we 'll be where the shots are singing," called Wilkins cheerily. The cool voice of the river captain steadied Gordon's nerve. The soldier's blood stirred within him.

"There is not a moment to lose, Gordon," said Regina in an agitated whisper. "Quick! get Markley! I fear we are already too late!"

The River Queen had begun to move.

Clayborne roused himself to action.

"It is too late now, Gordon. Already we have left the shore."

In the stern of the River Queen was a small skiff. Clayborne lowered it quickly to the water, then turned, and catching the woman in his arms lifted her from her feet.

"What are you going to do with me?" she asked, with an accent of apprehension.

"Put you in the skiff," and before she could speak he had swung her over the rail and she was in the boat.

"Markley" — she panted, "let him out — he can swim for it — and you shall come too — I will

pick you both up," she said with suppressed excitement, taking up the oars.

"For God's sake, Regina, row for the shore quickly," he whispered hoarsely, leaning over the rail. He looked down into the brilliant eyes, and the face encircled by dark locks turned up towards him; then sprang quickly back and hurried away.

The woman sat for a moment with the oars at rest. The River Queen, with slowly revolving paddle was turning out into the stream. With a few sharp strokes Regina brought the skiff up under the stern, fastened it by the painter, and rose to her feet.

The steamboat had increased its speed, the little craft in the rear danced lightly along at the risk of throwing Regina into the water, but the woman ignored the danger. There was a baffled expression in her eyes, but they did not show the resignation of defeat. A sudden lurch of the skiff threw her to her knees. She grasped the gunwale and steadied herself. Leaning forward, she pulled on the painter until the little boat was close up under the stern of the larger craft. The spray dashed into her face, blinding her. She heeded it not. Brushing the water from her eyes and shaking it from her hair, she sprang in on the lower deck, and disappeared into the obscurity of the vessel.

Gordon Clayborne, in starting for the companionway, had run squarely against a man who came suddenly out.

"Brainard," he demanded, as soon as he recognized the lieutenant, "are all the men at their assigned posts?"

Brainard scrutinized his face closely before replying slowly: "The men are all at their assigned posts."

"Then why are you not at yours?"

"I was just going there, sir."

"See that the men stationed below the waterline are supplied with damp cotton to stop up as much as possible any shot-holes made by the enemy's fire."

"Yes, sir," and the lieutenant turned slowly away, leaving Clayborne to make his way towards the wheelhouse.

The engineer had begun to stoke the fires. Sparks flew from the smokestacks, dancing away on the wind, to fall hissing into the swiftly flowing water. Gordon took up his place by Captain Wilkins's side, and straining his eyes tried to distinguish the outlines of the shore as the boat wound its way down the river.

Francis Ware stood before the cabin in which Markley the spy was locked. A look of great dissatisfaction was on the young man's brow. His mind was preoccupied. All his thoughts for the last few days had been upon the same subject, Flora Dowd. He had seen how this captivating creature had ingratiated herself into the good graces of his superior officer. He did not wonder

at this, but he was jealous. He felt positive that she was wrongfully accused. He did not blame Captain Clayborne for allowing her such liberty on the boat, but he was jealous. Flora had smiled on Francis Ware. She had been confidential. She had awakened his deep sympathy for her. He was in love with her. He could no longer conceal the fact from himself. He thought about her night and day. Her face was continually before him. So when a lithe figure flashed behind a pile of hay-bales, his quick eye knew it was she. The next instant his hand was upon her arm and he was looking into her face.

"Mr. Ware, you hurt me."

His hand dropped. "I would not hurt you for the world. Why are you hiding here? I know Clayborne has given you the liberty to stay on deck, but neither there or here are safe places for you now. There will be no safety for you. He is a brute to allow you to incur the danger we are about to run." He spoke with great feeling.

Regina looked into his eyes. She felt that she must play high.

"Oh, if I only had some one in whom I could trust," she sighed.

"Trust me. Whenever I am near you my heart leaps within me. I would do anything in the world for you."

"Would you, surely — surely?"

"I swear it."

"Then give me the key to the cabin where Markley is."

"I cannot. I have not got it."

She looked at him closely and saw that he spoke the truth.

"Who has it?"

"Captain Clayborne."

"Then get it."

"Get it from him and give it to you?" repeated Ware.

In the darkness Regina Bowie could not see the look of horror in his eyes, but her alert ear caught the tremble in his voice.

"You want me to trust you, do you not?" she asked quickly.

"Yes."

"Then draw up a skiff which is trailing from the stern, and stow it where it will not be seen. I shall need it later."

With feverish haste he obeyed her. "You are going to escape," he whispered. "I cannot bear to think of the danger you incur. I must aid you."

"Have you thought of the risk you yourself will have to run?" she breathed in his ear.

"I can think of nothing but you."

"Then you shall go with me. Get me the key to the cabin where Markley is confined, and bring it to me here, then keep near this skiff. For the Lord's sake, do not let any one take it away from here."

Ware caught her in his arms. "Woman, wo-

man, ask what you will of me, and you shall have it," he whispered ardently. "You are my very soul! I can deny you nothing."

"Then get me the key," she whispered softly.

"Yes, yes, I will."

"Quickly, then. Now let me go for the present," she exclaimed, and concealed herself among the bales.

The River Queen steadily steered her course down the Mississippi. A tongue of flame shot out from the Vicksburg shore, followed by a rumbling roar. The River Queen had been discovered. Puff! puff! forward she went.

Up to the present moment the steamer had been sighted only by some of the lower batteries, shooting across a long neck of land; but as she rounded the point she came at once within full range of the batteries all along the line. From every side sheets of flame burst forth as the great guns hurled their ten-inch shot and shell at the River Queen. Wilkins steered his boat within three hundred yards of the Vicksburg shore, and the guns on the high bluffs shot over his head. The noise was deafening, although few shots had struck the devoted little steamer as yet. She answered bravely with her panting, Puff! puff! puff! sending out great volumes of black smoke as the engineer fed his fire with the barrels of pork.

The scene burst forth into lurid light as the Confederates set fire to some old houses. Then they got the range. Riddled by shot was the

River Queen, — punctured above and below the water-line; but the bales of cotton and hay protected her vital parts, and puffing quicker and quicker, gasping, wheezing, leaking, groaning, the old boat sped down the river at ten miles an hour. A shot crashed through the pilot-house, but Captain Wilkins held his course.

"In fifteen minutes," said Clayborne to Lieutenant Brainard, as they stood on the lower deck among the men, "we shall get out of range of those guns. I thought we could run those batteries even in the River Queen." Brainard gave Clayborne a quick comprehensive glance. There was a strange look on his face in which suspicion, admiration, and distrust all were mingled. Clayborne did not see the look, for even as he spoke a tongue of flame shot out from some bales of hay amidships. "We have caught fire!" cried Clayborne. "Brainard, send some men here! Get buckets, boys! Don't let the fire spread! Into the river with some of those bales! Come, pass the buckets quicker!" he shouted. A double line was formed, and water thrown on the hissing flames. Men with axes chopped at burning timbers, straining every nerve to prevent the flames from spreading through the boat, but still the conflagration increased rapidly.

When the fire and confusion were at their height, with every man engaged in the desperate fight against the flames, an agile form slid out from behind a pile of bales which were as yet untouched

by the fire. It was Regina Bowie, and with excited but nimble fingers she unlocked a door.

"It is I, Markley," she cried, bursting into the room. Markley, whose usually red face was pale to the lips, recovered his self-possession at the sight of her. "Thank God!" he cried, "I feared I was to be left to roast like a stalled ox."

"We 'll have to get out of here," she cried. "This part of the boat will be too hot to hold us in a few moments."

"I 'm ready."

"In the stern of this boat is a skiff. We must get off in her right smart, Markley. These Yankees will have enough to attend to in putting out the fire I started, but if they catch me I reckon they 'll cook my goose."

While she spoke she hurriedly led the way to the stern, dodging behind and clambering over boxes of provisions and bales of hay with the lithe-ness of a panther.

"Here is the skiff!" cried Markley.

"Launch it quicker than lightning!" said Regina. "We 've not a second to spare."

Markley bent to the task. Out of the smoke rushed Francis Ware. Markley, with the skiff in the water, turned around for Regina. He saw Ware, and sprang at him. Unmindful of Regina's commanding voice, Markley grappled with the young lieutenant. The struggle was fierce and short. The younger man fought valiantly, but he had been taken by surprise, and he was greatly

overmatched. Markley lifted him up in his arms and threw him bodily into the water.

"Now, Regina, into the boat with you!" cried Markley.

She obeyed with a spring, and Markley at her side cast off the painter and took up the oars.

"Reach a hand to the young fellow; he 's hurt," said Regina quietly.

"Let the boy drown," replied Markley; "we 've no time for philanthropy"—

"Do as I say, Markley!" she cried with that peremptory tone of command which admitted of no reply. Without further protest Frank Ware was hauled into the boat.

"Now row for the east shore, Markley," Regina commanded further.

CHAPTER XV

THE RIVER QUEEN'S BOILER

ALTHOUGH the River Queen was burning fiercely, she still obeyed the helm. A few minutes more and she might get past the batteries. If the fire could be controlled she might still get down the river in safety. Gordon Clayborne knew that the steamer had been set on fire by some treacherous hand. His heart grew sick at the thought that the adventure, which had come so near success, might end in disastrous failure. But he fought misfortune with all the stubbornness of his unyielding disposition, and inspired by his example his men fought the flames with desperate energy. They seemed to hold the conflagration in check for a few moments. The fate of the River Queen swung in the balance.

A sharp, discordant yell sounded above the roar of the flames. Clayborne knew that cry full well. He sprang up the companionway to the deck. A large yawl had put off from the Vicksburg shore, and aided by the current was keeping up with the steamer. There were a score of armed men in the boat, and a second time the wild rebel yell rang out over the water.

"Yanks ahoy!" called out a gruff voice. "Your jig is up! Run your boat ashore and surrender!"

Clayborne stepped into the shadow of the pilot-house. "Does she still obey her helm?" he inquired of the man at the wheel. Captain Wilkins nodded.

"Keep her headed down the river. If that yawl comes too near, swing into it."

"Run your boat for the shore, or we 'll give you a volley!" cried the same voice. Clayborne saw a pivot gun swing round in the bow of the yawl.

"Keep her steady, Captain Wilkins. We 've got the fire under control a little; we may possibly hold our own."

"Shoot the man at the wheel! Aim at the pilot-house with the bow-chaser," came from the yawl.

"Port your helm quickly, Captain, and spoil their aim!" cried Clayborne. A volley of musketry rattled about the pilot-house. The shot from the howitzer struck at Gordon's side, covering him with splinters. One ragged fragment hit his forehead. He reeled down to the rail. Caught at it to steady himself. His nerveless fingers relaxed, and he pitched heavily forward into the river.

Wilkins uttered a sharp, quick oath as his hand fell helpless from the helm; the wheel flew about, and the River Queen fell off toward the west shore.

Again came the fierce rebel yell. Then a voice sounded clear and distinct, "Now, you Yanks, will you surrender?"

Captain Wilkins pulled himself together. Wrapping a bandanna handkerchief tightly around his right hand, he grasped the swaying wheel with his left and brought the River Queen up to her course. "Surrender hell!" he shouted. "You come and get us if you want us! I reckon you 'll get your whiskers singed!"

Lieutenant Brainard, holding the flames in check below the deck, heard the volley of musketry above. He heard the rebel yell, followed by the call to surrender. He could not restrain himself longer. With an oath he, too, rushed for the deck. The men in the yawl were reloading for another volley. Wilkins signaled to the engineer for greater speed. Brainard saw the yawl with its howitzer in the bow trained on the River Queen. He saw twenty muskets aimed. He looked quickly around for Clayborne, and sprang into the pilot-house.

"Where is that scoundrel?" he cried.

There was a roar and a crash louder than any volley of musketry. The steamer's boiler had exploded, and the River Queen drifted down the stream a hopeless and sinking wreck.

The rush of cold water had brought Gordon Clayborne back to consciousness. Obeying the natural instinct of man, he struck out to swim for the vessel, holding his chin above water. He saw the River Queen a hundred yards down the river. Then came a terrific roar. A sheet of flame shot upward. The river seemed to writhe, and the air was thick with falling, blazing meteors.

Gordon dove straight toward the river-bed; when he rose to the surface he warded off with one hand the floating débris which surrounded him. Pieces of charred lumber, boxes of provisions, bales of hay littered the stream, while a few hundred yards distant the River Queen had grounded on the western shore, and was now burning to the water's edge. Further resistance was useless. The men thought only of escape. All who had not been thrown into the water by the explosion now jumped to escape the fire. Many of them were picked up by the Confederates, and of those who succeeded in reaching the land the majority fell into the hands of guerrillas lying concealed in the brush.

Clayborne resolved, if possible, to float with the current down the river, and land in the protection of the Union lines. He felt his strength giving out, and casting about for some support, drew himself upon a bale of hay. Here he lay for a moment, with his stomach close to the hay while he looked up and down the river. Above him the batteries had almost ceased firing, although an occasional shot came swishing over the water. One of these random missiles struck so near as to deluge him with the spray, while the concussion overturned his craft, spilling him again into the river. As he came to the surface, he heard a faint cry, and his hand struck against the face of a man who was floating past him. Clayborne grasped the man with one hand, while he steadied his raft with the

other. Drawing himself up once more, he succeeded after great efforts in pulling the man up after him.

It was Captain Wilkins, wounded and weak from loss of blood.

Wilkins tried to speak, and Clayborne placed his ear near the lips of the wounded man.

"The boiler busted after all," murmured the captain feebly.

Clayborne steadied his little craft with the greatest care, for he felt he lacked the strength to draw Wilkins up, if it should again capsize. Then he noticed that under the additional weight the hay, now saturated with water, began to settle slowly. He took off his boots, coat, and waistcoat.

"What are you going to do, partner?" asked Wilkins, who had been watching him with interest.

"This hay is fast losing its buoyancy, Wilkins. I am preparing for emergencies."

"That last volley those cusses fired prepared me all right," replied the captain grimly.

Clayborne slid carefully into the water.

"What yer about now?" inquired Captain Wilkins, raising himself upon one elbow.

"This craft was not designed for two, Wilkins, though it ought to carry you alone if you don't kick about much. As for me, I'll swim for shore," and Gordon Clayborne gave the bale a gentle shove with his feet; the movement sending his own body a few yards in the opposite direction. For a few moments he allowed himself to float with

the current, while he took his bearings. It was growing darker on the river as the fire burned lower and lower on the wreck of the River Queen, but a faint glow over the Vicksburg bluffs showed the approach of dawn. Gordon struck out toward the western bank. If he could reach it he intended to lie concealed in the woods all day, and make his way to the Union forces down the river by night. He had not swum a dozen strokes when the outlines of a rowboat became visible in the dim morning light. Clayborne stopped swimming and trod water quietly, trusting that the occupants of the boat would pass him by unnoticed. But a lynx-eyed fellow had marked the ripple on the water, and the boat bore down upon him until an oar was suspended over his head.

"Do you surrender?" inquired a voice.

"I do," was the answer, and Gordon Clayborne was hauled into a dory.

In the boat were three men. "We 've fished up one Yank, anyhow," said one.

"Hi! there is another!" called out one of his companions. "Row over to that bale of hay yonder!"

A few strokes brought them alongside of Captain Wilkins.

"Well, they got you in quick time," was his comment, "but I 'm so chock full of lead I 'm liable to sink the boat if they take me in."

"He is so bad hurt it ain't much use to carry him in," remarked one of the Confederates. "It

will only mean one more man for the hospital. We might as well let him alone."

"Hold on there!" exclaimed another, "the man ain't no use, I'll allow, but there 's a right smart-looking coat and a better pair of boots than I hev seen in a year. Better git them before you shove off."

"'Pears like we all three come in on this deal," and the man gave a waistcoat to one companion, a pair of boots to the other, keeping the coat for himself.

"Those articles are all mine," said Gordon.

"I reckon finding 's keepings just at present, sonny," was the cool rejoinder. "I seen you swimming away and making towards shore like a good one. Just because you claim these things as yourn don't make 'em so. Row up under the lower batteries, Joe, and we'll take our prisoners ashore."

Clayborne had no intention to appear before the enemy at Vicksburg in any more of an undress uniform than he could help, so he said quietly: —

"I was the commander of that expedition, and I am now a prisoner of war. That is my clothing, but I am willing to pay you for restoring it to me," and he took a damp United States note from his trousers' pocket.

The greenback proved a persuasive argument, and the clothing was delivered with the remark:

"I calculate it 's yourn, if you 're willing to pay for it."

Captain Clayborne quietly pulled on his boots and put on his coat, and then, without further resistance or remonstrance, was taken to the city a prisoner of war, where he found a number of survivors of the wreck, prisoners like himself. Heavy at heart, Clayborne looked about him to see who was missing. Less than half of his own men were there, and only two of the steamboat crew. Brainard, Ware, one of the sergeants, and over twoscore men were not accounted for. In his soul Gordon prayed that they had reached the land and thence had made their escape, but he knew the difficulties they would encounter, and he greatly feared that many of them were either killed or captured.

Being the commanding officer, he was soon separated from his men and confined by himself. The place of his imprisonment was an old tobacco warehouse, now partially occupied by the Commissary Department. Clayborne was put into a room on the lower floor, the windows of which looked out upon a courtyard where a sentry paced day and night. There was no furniture in the room beyond a few boxes which served him for chair and table. A rolled-up blanket in the corner was his bed.

The next day after his capture he was taken into the office of the Commissioner for the Exchange of Prisoners, which was in another part of the same building.

An officer in a well-brushed uniform rose from

his chair as Gordon Clayborne was ushered into the room.

"This is Captain Clayborne, who tried to run our batteries?" he inquired, looking at Gordon carefully.

"It is, sir," replied the latter.

"I am Major Sharp, Commissioner for the Exchange of Prisoners," returned the other impressively.

Clayborne bowed.

"Let me offer you a chair, sir," continued the major affably.

There was a certain mixture of pompousness and kindly good nature about the major which disarmed any strong feeling of hostility. Gordon bowed again politely, and took the proffered chair.

"By gad, sir," exclaimed the major, leaning back in his seat, "our boys have got the range over the river pretty closely now. You can tell old Porter to send along some more of his gunboats. We 'll smash them into kindling wood, as we did that boat of yours," and Major Sharp laughed airily.

Clayborne did not smile; the event was too recent and too tragic to be viewed humorously.

"Did I not hear, Major, that a Quaker gunboat of cotton bales and pork barrels came floating down the river one night not long ago, carrying the fear of death and destruction with it? Is that story correct that your boys blew up the Indianola rather than let it fall into the hands of this *terrible destroyer?*"

"You 're right, Captain; you had the laugh on us that time," the major admitted frankly.

"So we should have this time but for" —

"But for a neat shot through the engine-room, eh?" interrupted the major cheerfully.

"No, sir, you never reached our engine. We were set on fire by — Oh, the devil!" cried Gordon hotly, "what 's the use of talking about it now it 's all over! The fortunes of war wrecked the River Queen when she had almost gotten safely through, and I am a prisoner."

"Don't take it too much to heart," replied the major cheerfully. "I 've seen many thousands of you fellows first and last. As you know, I am the Commissioner for Exchange. I have authority to take your parole. If you will sign the usual cartel you will practically become a free man, except that you cannot take up arms again until formally exchanged." Major Sharp handed his prisoner a paper. Gordon read it carefully twice, and then said slowly: —

"I like that document, Major, all but one clause. If you 'll let me draw my pen through that I 'll sign willingly."

"Which clause is that?"

"The one binding myself not to take up arms until exchanged. At the rate exchanges are taking place I might be obliged to remain inactive for a year or two."

The major laughed. "If you do not sign you will have to remain inactive until the end of the war."

"I 'll take the risk."

"Why should you object to that little agreement?" persisted the ruddy-faced major. "I 've placed that same document in the hands of many thousands of your people within the last few months, and I shall be surprised," he went on with importance, "if I don't give General Grant one of those to sign right here in this room within thirty days."

Gordon smiled. "I should not be surprised to see General Grant right here in this room within thirty days, but not as a prisoner of war, Major Sharp."

"Time will show, Captain Clayborne, and in the mean time you had better think over the matter of signing this cartel."

"I will think it over," replied Gordon.

"While you are pondering the subject won't you join me in a drink. It may facilitate thought," said the major, crossing over to a table in the corner on which stood a jug and a tin cup.

"Not so early in the morning, thank you."

"Will you pardon me, then, if I drink alone?" inquired the major, pouring out a generous bumper.

"Certainly."

As Major Sharp put the whiskey to his lips, the door opened, and an orderly entered and stood at attention.

"What is this?" inquired the major, when he had replaced the empty cup on the table.

"A message from headquarters, sir."

Major Sharp broke the seal and read the paper at a glance. "The devil!" he exclaimed, turning to Clayborne apologetically. "I have just received instructions from the commanding general to withhold your parole for the present."

Gordon bowed. "That simplifies matters, Major; the affair is then not left for me to decide."

"I am truly chagrined, sir," said the major.

"Do not be troubled on my account," replied Gordon.

"I am instructed to have you reconducted to your jail. I trust that you find the quarters comfortable," continued Sharp.

Gordon smiled. "They are comfortable as could be expected."

"Let me know if I can do anything for you at any time," added the good-natured official, as Gordon was escorted back to his cell.

Captain Gordon Clayborne had not been relodged in his prison for half an hour when a guard came in and announced: —

"Major Bowie would like to see you, sir!"

The name startled Gordon's ears. He knew no member of that family who held the rank of major.

"Who the deuce is he?" asked Gordon of himself. "Show the gentleman in," he said aloud.

A light footstep sounded in the hallway, and Miss Regina Bowie came into the room. She was dressed in a suit of soft Confederate gray, with

short skirt covering the tops of a pair of neat riding-boots. The jacket was close fitted to her form and shone resplendent with a double row of army buttons.

"You see, Gordon," she exclaimed, "how soon the tables have been turned. You are now our prisoner." There was a saucy curve to her full lips, and her wondrous expressive eyes looked at him with their alluring gaze.

"I was told Major Bowie wanted to see me," he said, with surprise.

"*I* am Major Bowie," she answered with due gravity. "Did you not know that? I hold a commission in the Confederate army signed by President Davis: 'For valuable services rendered to these Confederate States of America by Regina Bowie,' a special act of Congress made her a major and voted her the thanks of the nation." Regina pointed to the star which decorated her coat with a gesture of self-approbation.

"Well, Major Bowie, so you were right after all. The River Queen did not get past the batteries, and I am a prisoner."

"You know you hold your freedom in your own hands, Gordon," she replied seriously.

"They have just refused to let me sign a parole," he answered.

"You gave me my freedom, Gordon; I can give you yours."

"How can you do that?" he asked quickly, looking at her closely.

"Oh, I have more power than you think," she replied lightly. Then speaking with greater earnestness, she said, "But I shall not be as generous as you were. Perhaps it is because I am a woman, perhaps it is because it is my nature, I shall exact a promise from you. You must come back to us. It seems to me now more than ever as if Fate had ordered that I should be the means of winning you back. Your destiny and mine are somehow bound together. I cannot explain how, but I feel it. You shall come back to our cause — to us." There was a note of prophecy in her tone which could not fail to move him.

"Regina," he exclaimed, "what a strange woman you are! I who have known you so long feel that I do not understand you."

There was an inscrutable expression in her wonderful deep eyes as she replied slowly, "How can you expect to understand me at all times, when I do not always understand myself?"

Gordon shook his head. "It seems to me that our paths in life have long since become separated. I feel that they will grow farther apart."

"It shall not be, Gordon!" she replied impulsively, taking both his hands in hers. "I want you always to be my friend. I could never bear to have you go out of my life forever. You shall not!"

She stood between him and the window. The sun streaming in touched her head, bringing out the warm, rich color of her dark hair. The light

enveloped her whole person, making her seem more than ever a creature of ardent life, a part of the warm sunlight of day. A figure passed before the window. It passed rapidly, giving a quick jealous glance into the room as it went by. The figure was of a young man dressed as a lieutenant in the Confederate army.

Gordon sprang to the window. The form had disappeared, but he had seen a pale, boyish face with brown eyes. Turning towards Regina Bowie, he demanded excitedly, "How did he come here?"

"Who?" she inquired.

"Francis Ware in the uniform of the Confederate army."

For almost the first time in her life Regina Bowie changed color. "I could not help it," she said; "he insisted on coming with me."

"You could not help it!" he cried scornfully. "Did he desert of his own accord, and change his coat without persuasion?"

"He would follow me, and no man shall do that and not wear my colors," she replied with spirit. "And why not," she continued, regaining her composure. "He is another soldier for us and a good one. He 's a right fine young fellow. All 's fair in love and war, and a woman must make recruits where she can."

"'All 's fair in love and war,'" repeated Gordon with withering sarcasm.

"Heavens, Gordon," exclaimed Regina, "you do not suppose I 'm in love with the boy!"

"In love with him, no," cried Gordon, "but you have made him love you."

Regina shrugged her shoulders. "Nonsense, I can't help it if the boy likes me a little."

"You have induced him to desert. Think of what that means. You have ruined his life to gratify your vanity, or merely to get another — 'recruit.'" And he caught her arm and looked sternly into her face.

"'All 's fair in love and war!'" he repeated a second time. "Who set fire to the River Queen? Tell me!" and he shook her by the arm.

Her eyes flashed up at his fearlessly. "You are such a different person when you are angry, Gordon, I am a little afraid of you; but I think I like you better when you are angry."

"Who set fire to the boat?" he demanded again vehemently.

"I will not tell you."

He dropped her arm and turned away.

"What will his family do when they learn that he is a deserter?" he continued, speaking more to himself than to the woman.

"They need never know," she answered coolly. "They will think he was killed."

"They shall never know from me," cried Gordon.

"And you will forgive me when I tell you that no matter what I may have done, I desire your welfare," exclaimed Regina. "You will forgive me, won't you?" she repeated persuasively.

"For what?" he inquired bitterly. "For decoying young Ware, for setting fire to the River Queen? My God, Regina, what am I to think of you?"

"Think," she answered passionately, "that in a sacred cause all means are justified, all acts are sacred. I will stop at nothing. Young Ware was necessary to me, so I took him. I resolved that the River Queen should not go past the batteries carrying Markley a prisoner, and she did not!"

She stood defiantly before him, her dark eyes flashing proudly, her body trembling with emotion.

Gordon could not look upon her without being moved by the very violence of her passion.

Controlling his own feelings, he said sternly: —

"You have great power over Ware?"

"Yes."

"He would do anything in the world for you?"

"I think so, yes."

"Then make him leave you. His friends think that he is dead. Force him to leave you and let him come to life again."

"I cannot."

"Why not? You do not love him."

"I cannot give him up," she repeated obdurately.

"You mean you will not."

She turned away from him, and there followed a few moments of silence, which was broken by the woman saying in her low, sweet voice, "You have not told me yet that you forgive me, Gordon."

"No, I have not forgiven you."

"But you will, Gordon; say that you will."

"I cannot say it."

"Is that your friendship for me?" she asked reproachfully.

"And your friendship for me, what of that?" he replied bitterly. "Oh, Regina, I see you at this moment as you really are! I shall always see you thus."

She looked full at him while she shook her head doubtingly. "You are angry with me now, but you will get over your anger. When you are cooler, you will forgive me. Good-by for the present, Gordon."

CHAPTER XVI

IN VICKSBURG AND OUT

DURING six weeks Gordon Clayborne remained a prisoner in Vicksburg. Almost hourly he heard the besieging cannon roar, and yet Grant remained outside the city.

Regina Bowie had disappeared from the scene. There was still a way to get out of Vicksburg for those who knew it and who had the daring. "Major" Regina Bowie had gone off on a secret mission of importance, and Francis Ware had gone with her.

Clayborne's imprisonment was indeed wearisome, although the tedium was sometimes alleviated by the cheerful Major Sharp. The latter would occasionally invite Gordon to visit him in his office, to share a friendly pipe of tobacco or an old newspaper, and to talk over the latest news of the siege. The major was an optimistic little soul who saw everything on his own side of the fence through rose-colored glasses.

"Clayborne," he said, speaking with great seriousness, "there was a time when I thought your General Grant was the most active and efficient officer in the Federal service; but now, sir, I'm compelled to change my mind."

"I don't see why you should begin to doubt his activity or efficiency just now, Major, in view of the events of the past weeks."

"That 's just it, sir. How a man of any military ability could put himself between the millstones of Johnston and Pemberton and then calmly sit down and wait to be ground up is more than I can understand."

"But he has not been ground up yet, Sharp, and it seems to me he is doing a good deal of grinding. Why does n't Johnston do some of it?"

"He has been waiting for reinforcements, so as to make a sure thing of it. Do you know, Clayborne, I have a strong presentiment, sir, that I shall have your General Grant in here before many days as a prisoner of war," said Sharp, with a cordial laugh as he turned to his newspaper, which made its appearance printed upon the reverse side of some flowery wall-paper. With deep interest the dapper major read the leading editorial: —

"The report of the auditor of the commonwealth shows that our condition as a self-sustaining people has materially improved since the beginning of the war. This interesting and exhaustive report shows conclusively that the number of cattle, sheep, horses, slaves, and swine in these Confederate States of America, as a whole, increased rather than diminished during the last twelve months. This information will be most gratifying to those of us who live in the great cities, where the visible supply of provisions is temporarily restricted. Should it not be a source of great pride and satisfaction

— we might add of consolation, were we in need of being consoled — that the country at large is so prosperous and that this prosperity is in the face of the fact that large invading armies are overrunning our fair land, eating and devastating our crops, stealing our horses, and killing our fat beeves by the thousand?

"It is true that Providence has seen fit to remove many of our hogs by the means of pestilence, but it is not for us to question the workings of Providence. And if we have less hogs, have we not our horses, our cattle, and our slaves?

"It is also true that Abe Lincoln has issued a proclamation emancipating all our slaves, and this emancipation has become effective so far as the Northern arms have been able to sustain it; but when the war is ended, and we are dictating terms of peace at Washington, shall we not exact from 'Father Abraham' twice, yea thrice payment for our chattels so unrighteously taken from us?"

In another column Sharp read the following: —

"The commanding general's report states with exceeding regret that the supply of rations in this city has been reduced, but that this reduction is beyond the control of those in charge of the Commissary Department. Therefore, should not those who are not actively engaged in fighting be glad to temporarily abstain from eating meat, in order that all of it may be given to the brave boys bearing arms in our sacred cause?"

STRAY ITEMS OF NEWS.

"It comes to us by rather a circuitous route that 'Beast' Butler has pocketed all the silver spoons in New Orleans. The 'Beast' calls the Southern girls 'little devils.'"

"Coming from such a source, this is a compliment," interpolated the gallant major, and then he continued: —

"The Yankees were doubtless aware that yesterday was to be observed in this city by fasting and prayer; yet it was in perfect keeping with their nature to endeavor to interrupt the devotions of our people by continuous cannonading."

"Just like them," acquiesced Sharp.

LITERARY.

"We have to thank the literary ladies and gentlemen of the South for the manner in which they have seconded our efforts to build up a high class literary journal independent of Yankeedom. We have now upon our table over one hundred articles in prose and poetry from the ablest pens in Vicksburg. Among them are letters of congratulation, advice, and encouragement. We shall in our next issue devote a small portion of our space to answering the thousand and one communications from our correspondents and in enumerating the articles accepted and those rejected.

"We add to our list of contributors the names of Miss Bella Jones and Miss Regina Bowie. Miss Bowie recently escaped from the Yankees, by whom she was held as a prisoner of war. Miss Jones is a poetess of considerable renown.

"If this war has done us no other good, it has at least freed us from the thralldom of the Yankee printing-press. We are no longer obliged to read worthless Yankee books, but will have Southern books, written by Southern gentlemen, printed by Southern type, on Southern paper, and sold by Southern publishers.

"(NOTE. — Our next issue may be slightly delayed,

owing to the non-arrival of a consignment of paper through the blockade.)"

With an angry snort the major continued to read from another article: —

"Just as we were about to go to press we were overcome by mortification and surprise to see, in passing along Main Street, this shameless advertisement flaunting the eye before the book emporium of Carter and West: —

"'For sale, 1000 copies of standard authors! A choice collection of Dickens and Thackeray, Carlyle, Emerson, and Longfellow.'

"We are horrified to note that every one of these books bears the impress of a Northern publishing house. We were just congratulating ourselves that the war had freed us from literary vassalage to the Yankees, and now comes Carter and West's advertisement like a bolt from a clear sky. We are too shocked and grieved to denounce such subservience with our accustomed vigor of style. We therefore remonstrate with our erring brothers more in sorrow than in anger. We beseech them to throw those accursed volumes into the river.

"Dickens and Thackeray would be of course good literature, were their books reprinted by Southern publishers, and we think it possible these talented Englishmen might find good material for their clever pens in our present war. Such titles as these would find ready sale among us: —

"'David Copperhead, A Tale of the Reconstructed North,' by Charles Dickens. 'The New Virginians, or Spurning the Northern Scum,' by Wm. M. Thackeray.

"But as it is, these books are all defiled by the Northern pitch. Let Carter and West be Spartans, and may patriotism triumph over sordid motives of gain. Throw

all those volumes into the fire, or bury them a mile deep, that the teachings of Emerson and Longfellow may not be allowed to corrupt the morals of our people."

"Burn them! use them as Mahomet used the library of Alexandria, for fuel to heat the baths," cried Major Sharp dramatically, as he turned to the financial page.

FINANCIAL.

"There was never a better time to pay off debts than at present. Money is plenty. Send in your subscriptions!

"Beware of counterfeit bills. There are very clever counterfeits of the hundred and five hundred dollar issues in circulation. One of our most respected merchants, in counting up his cash last night, discovered to his horror that of five thousand dollars he had two thousand in bad bills.

"The man who would debase the national currency during the present crisis is a fool as well as a knave.

"Scrutinize all your money closely. The witticism of the fellow who said the other day that it did not matter much whether he took good or bad bills is beneath contempt.

"Sugar advanced fifty cents a pound yesterday, but cotton is a dollar fifty a pound in New York."

"Cotton is still king!" cried the major jubilantly.

IN LIGHTER VEIN.

"The department has curtailed the rations of meat, but as long as there is left to us one ounce of mulesteak we will hold out.

"By the way, who said mulesteak was tough?

"Succulent kitten fricassees are now being served at Bailey's restaurant.

"Cold mule-tongue à la Bray is a tasty thing for luncheon these hot days."

"Here is a conundrum, Clayborne," said the major, with twinkling eye, as he carefully folded his newspaper: —

"If Ulysses spent ten years before the walls of Troy, how long will it take his modern namesake to capture Vicksburg?" and whistling cheerily, the major set himself to the duties of the day.

Grant was closing in on Vicksburg. With that persistence which ignores opposition he had pressed steadily forward. Within the few weeks since crossing the Mississippi, his men had marched two hundred miles. Placed between two armies, the combined forces of which outnumbered his own, he had fought and won five battles, taking many prisoners. He had beaten Johnston off, and driven Pemberton back into Vicksburg. "We have been lucky in meeting the enemy in detail," was Grant's simple way of describing a campaign as unprecedented and extraordinary as it was brilliant and successful.

The relentless coil of his victorious armies tightened around the helpless city.

With that courage which does not know defeat even when staring it in the face, the Confederates held the town. Starving, they talked bravely of plenty; overwhelmed, they talked cheerfully of the prospect of the siege being raised.

Twice did the Union forces storm the breastworks, and each time they were repulsed with loss. "We are invincible," called down the lean but defiant Southerner from his rampart. "It will take your General Grant ten years to subdue us."

"I will capture the city if it takes thrice ten years," replied the determined Grant; and with his army reinforced so that he no longer feared Johnston, who was hovering in his rear, Grant sat down before the walls. Close up to the enemy's works his army pressed, throwing aside the musket for the spade, and building its own defenses under the muzzles of the enemy's guns.

The opposing armies were not always engaged in deadly strife. The confronting batteries were sometimes silent and at rest. How marvelously inconsistent is man! He can view thousands of his enemy mowed down in the hot charge of battle without a quiver of sympathy; he can calmly devise and construct a devilish mine, and coolly touch it off, blowing his fellow creatures into eternity. But when the battle has ceased, and the work of destruction is over, he will minister alike to friend and foe. He alleviates the suffering of his groaning enemy. He tries to restore the wonderful mechanism of the same human body which a short time ago he was passionately striving to tear apart. He will even take from his own thirsty lips the cup of precious water and moisten the parched tongue of his dying foe. He can bayonet his assailant, and hurl him from the parapets with as

little feeling as if he were sticking a pig; and when the assault is over, when the besieger has drawn back his attacking force, when the besieged is again strengthening his defenses, these bitter struggling foes of a few hours before can bandy words of jest and exchange rough courtesies.

"Hi, there! what are you Yanks a-doing?" yells a lusty throated Confederate.

"Guarding thirty thousand of you Johnny Rebs, and making you feed yourselves," is the reply.

"When is old Grant going to take Vicksburg?"

"Any day now when he has a mind to."

"Reckon he 'll change his mind when Johnston comes a little nearer."

"Johnston 's skedaddling in the other direction as fast as he can go."

"Reckon he 'll fool yer — and be back again. Then we 'll have Grant right where we want him, and he can't run away."

"Grant 's not one of the running kind. Guess you 'll know him better before long."

"I reckon it 'll be a long time before you know us any better if you stay out there. Why don't you come in and get us?"

"Easier work sitting here and starving you out."

"Huh, you 'll never do that. We 've got all the rations we can eat. We 'll be feeding you all before the summer is over."

Silence for a few moments.

"Hi! I say, Yank!"

"What do you want, Reb?"

"Got any coffee?"

"I guess I can get a little."

"Reckon if you could I can find a little smoking tobacco to give you in exchange."

"All right, throw it over; anything to oblige you."

And while the pickets laughed and smoked and chaffed together, the persistent army of the besiegers settled firmly and still more firmly about the city. The besieged was slowly drawing nearer to his last loaf of bread; he could see his last ounce of powder. Thus war goes on. Strange inconsistency of the human mind, each side was fighting for a principle dearer than life itself.

One hot June afternoon Gordon Clayborne had come into the prison yard for exercise and recreation. The exercise he got by walking up and down over a stretch of hot sun-baked earth where some negroes were throwing up the dirt to strengthen the ramparts; the recreation he found in contemplating a pair of Confederate sharpshooters exchanging occasional courtesies with some Union riflemen and whiling away the time between shots by playing seven-up with a greasy pack of cards. As the game grew interesting one of the sharpshooters placed his cap over the muzzle of his rifle, and exposing it gingerly to draw the enemy's fire, proceeded with the deal. He did not have to wait long. Zip! came a bullet, piercing the cap and whistling off into space. "Mighty lucky my skull

was n't in that cap," he exclaimed with nonchalance; "I play the Jack."

Ping! came another bullet, striking the rifle barrel, glancing off through the pack of cards at the dealer's elbow, scattering them like leaves; continuing its singing flight perilously near the head of a digging negro, finally to burrow deep into the soft earth. "Golly, dat came near biting dis nigger's ear," cried the darky, jumping out of the trench with alacrity and revealing to Gordon the shining, smiling countenance of Apollo. "Fo' de Lawd, hit 's Marse Claybun, hit certainly is," cried Apollo, forgetting his fright in his surprise. "What you a-doin' yeah, Marse Claybun?"

"That is what I should ask of you, Apollo. The last I heard of you, you were on board of a steamboat bound for St. Louis."

Apollo looked about him furtively to make sure that no one was within earshot. "I dun got tuck, marse."

"That was very foolish of you, Apollo."

"I know dat. I 's terruble careless. I lak dat steamboat so much I stayed dar all winter, den I gets on one ob Marse Porter's gumboats" —

"One of Admiral Porter's gunboats, Apollo?"

"Yas, suh, and dat yeah li'le gumboat gets stuck in de mud and we alls wuz kotched. Dat 's how I come to be workin' yeah mo' 'n I eber work on de ole marse's plantation."

"You were exceedingly unfortunate, Apollo. You should have remained in St. Louis."

"Marse Claybun, I doan't mine dat. I 's used to being kotched. I doan't mine dis work, and I can 'scape mos' any day I 's a min' to."

"How 's that?"

"I can get out of Vicksburg mos' any time I 's a min' to, marse. I knows de way," repeated Apollo, grinning widely. "Yas, suh, I certainly kin, but I 's mighty sorry to see you a prisoner, Marse Claybun. Lawd, how tough you mus' fin' dis yeah mule meat."

"I 'll have to put up with it, until General Grant captures the city, Apollo."

Clayborne continuing his walk, Apollo made a step as if to follow after, a look of subtlety appearing on his broad features. Then suddenly changing his mind, he leaped back into his ditch and began digging away vigorously, singing to himself as he worked: —

"Hol' your light, Brudder Robert,
Hol' your light;
Hol' your light on Canaan's shore.
What make ole Satan fer follow me so?
Satan ain't got notin' fer do wid me.

"Hol' your light,
Hol' your light on Canaan's shore.
Jordan Riber I 'm bound to go,
Bound to go, bound to go,
Jordan Riber I 'm bound to go,
And bid 'em fare ye well.

"We 'll cross de mighty riber,
My army cross over,

We 'll cross de Riber Jordan,
We 'll cross de danger water,
My army cross over,
Pharoah's army drowned,
My army cross over."

The darky's weird incantation sounded in Gordon Clayborne's ears as he walked back to his room, and through the open window was borne by the evening breeze the faint echoes of the chant, —

" Pharoah's army drowned
My army cross over."

The night was hot, and Gordon Clayborne sat with his nose to the window bars to get what air he could. Fetid and sultry, still it was better than the stifling atmosphere of the interior. Upon the parapets outside walked the sentinels. Lean and pinched they were. With hollow eyes and skin like parchment drawn over their lantern jaws, they stalked the night like the half-starved wolf. The eyes burned bright in the sunken sockets and the fingers which closed nervously on the musket-stock were still strong and sinewy. The last ounce of food, the last charge of powder, were in sight, but surrender was not yet written on their faces.

Gordon took from his pocket a newspaper three weeks old and read it by the light of an old lantern at his elbow.

A flying beetle, looking as lean and hungry as the most emaciated of the besieged, was trying to end its miserable existence by feeding upon the flame ; varying its attempts at self-destruction by

flying noisily about the room, now and then bringing up with a thud against the walls and falling to the floor, there to recover itself and again take wing to resume its stupid round.

So deeply interested was Gordon Clayborne that he did not hear a step behind him, and was not aware of another presence in the room until he felt a gentle twitch at the skirt of his coat. Turning suddenly he saw, to his astonishment, Apollo standing in the semi-obscurity, with his large bony finger to his lips, enjoining silence.

"What are you doing here, Apollo?"

"Hist, Marse Claybun, make no sound. Apollo has come fer to 'scape de captain. Marse Claybun lemme go free once. Now I 'se come to set him free — jis' like Marse Lincum's sojers," and Apollo grinned widely at the thought of acting the part of a liberator.

Clayborne shook his head, smiling at the simplicity of the darky.

"There 's no chance for me to escape, Apollo. There are sentinels posted outside. Even if I succeeded in getting past them, there are three or four sets of outworks, each carefully manned, and the men are watchful and vigilant; on the lookout for Yankee surprises."

"I tink Marse Claybun wanted to 'scape," said Apollo, with a crestfallen manner.

"I should like to get out — very much," answered Clayborne, "but there is no use attempting the impossible."

"I know de passwords fer de sentries," persisted Apollo cheerfully.

"You do?" Gordon spoke with more interest.

"Yas, suh, dar am two: 'Constitushum' fer de inside sentries, an' 'Riber Lights' fer dose on de outside works."

"Are you sure of that, Apollo?"

The darky looked aggrieved. "If Marse Claybun wan' to 'scape hit 's jis' ez easy — jis' ez easy — ez rollin' off a log."

"How?"

"Outside de city, far outside, mo' 'an 'leven mile down de riber," said Apollo, waving his arm with a wide sweep, "lib a lady," and the darky stopped here, rolling his eyes impressively.

"A lady? What has she to do with the matter?" interrogated Clayborne.

"Yas, suh," repeated Apollo emphatically; "a lady wid no husban'."

"A maiden lady?"

"No, marse, dat is not wat dey calls her. Her husban' is dead."

"Oh, a widow."

"Yas, suh."

"Well, Apollo, what have widow ladies to do with my escape?"

"Der 's a youn' 'federate officer dat I know of," continued Apollo, allowing his voice to drop still lower; "he go to see dis wider lady on seberal occashuns."

"What! in spite of the Union lines, Apollo? Nonsense!"

"Lawd sak', Marse Claybun, you dun know dis youn' officer; fire nor flood cud n't keep him 'way from de ladies. He 's been to see dis wider lady 'thout gettin' kotched, an' I dun go wid him on one of dese occashuns."

"Apollo, are you telling me the truth?"

"'Deed I is, marse, 'deed an' 'deed I is," declared the darky with great earnestness. "I go wid him ez his servant. And hit is jis' so much easier to go wid Marse Claybun 'cause we doan't hab to 'scape from Marse Lincum's sojers 'cause dey 're our fren's."

"Apollo, I 've a good mind to skin your black hide for raising my hopes like this. I could not run the sentries even though I did know the passwords. Some one would suspect or recognize me."

"Marse Claybun," whispered Apollo, "you jis' put on the coat which I brought, and you cum wid me; jis' ez shu ez you lib we 'll get pass dese 'federates." He produced a package from which he took out a coat of a Confederate major.

"Hit 's his dress coat," the darky added, with a chuckle, "de one he always wears when he visit de ladies. 'Pears lak hit 's scand'lous wicked fer me to steal it, an' I would n't do it fer anybody but Marse Claybun."

Gordon looked at the serious black face for a moment, then throwing off his coat slipped into the gray one, saying as he did so: "Apollo, if you

value your black hide, you 'd better be careful how you aid prisoners to escape."

The African grinned widely. "Ma black hide 's wuf a good deal to me, but Lawd sak's, Marse Claybun, we alls is too cute to get kotched dis time. In dis yeah basket wat I 'se got is de rations for de orficers' mess. Dey is mighty po' pickin's and dey is a-gettin' wurs an' wurs ebery day. I 'll jis' go out wid dese rations and you foller along lak you 'spected I run off wid 'em. Den when we all gets out of dis yeah commissionary we kin pass by all de sentries, wid you a-sayin' de countersign, an' lookin' lak you does."

"All right, lead the way, Apollo."

The sentry at the outer door of the building gave them but a glance as they went by. Apollo's black features were as set as polished bronze, and he walked as though he had no thought beyond the basket in his hand. Gordon Clayborne returned the soldier's salute, and walked nonchalantly out. Through the fortifications and past the outer works the countersign and the gray uniform carried them until they stood in the open space outside the furthest defenses.

Quickly followed by Apollo, Clayborne climbed a steep hill, and throwing himself on the ground looked back at the city they had left. It lay in silence and darkness, save when the voice of the changing guards, or the occasional flash of a gun with its singing shell, broke the stillness of the night air.

Gordon Clayborne continued looking down upon the city for a few moments, then turning to the negro, whispered: —

"Where are the Union pickets, Apollo?"

"Dey is about" — began the darky; but the sentence ended in a stifled yell, for he had been seized by the ankles and thrown violently to the ground.

Hands had been laid upon Clayborne at the same time. His instinct always led him to fight back, but he was almost immediately overpowered, and lay stretched upon the turf with a man on his chest and another on his legs.

They had fallen among some Union scouts, who had been quietly inspecting the Confederate batteries from the same knoll. When Clayborne became aware who his captors were, he announced his name, grade, and regiment.

"Then what in the deuce are you doing here, and why are you wearing that gray coat?" was the natural inquiry.

"I have just escaped from Vicksburg, and this coat aided me in getting past their sentries. Don't you tie my hands," he continued, resisting vigorously. "I 'll go with you quietly enough. I 'm only too anxious to get within the Union lines."

"Very well, come along then. We shall turn you over to the provost marshal. He can examine into the truth of your story."

"All right, as long as you take me to him at once," answered Clayborne.

A few minutes later they stood before the provost marshal's tent. Apollo's black face showed signs of fear. He did not understand such treatment in the hands of "Marse Lincum's sojers."

"Marshal, here 's a man whom we found skulking about in the dark in the company of a negro. He says he 's an officer of the —th regiment."

"I am Captain Gordon Clayborne, Company D, —th regiment," said Gordon haughtily, for he was fast losing patience.

The provost marshal jumped to his feet with a cry:—

"Captain Clayborne, I have an order for your arrest!"

"My arrest! Nonsense, marshal, I have been a prisoner in Vicksburg for the past six weeks."

"The warrant is dated several weeks back, and I take you into immediate custody."

"You 're crazy, marshal. This is an outrage, and I won't submit to it! Send at once to my regiment! Send for my colonel! Send to the general of brigade if you like"—

"No, sir," interrupted the provost marshal, "I know my business."

"Upon what charge do you dare lay hands upon me?" cried Clayborne hotly.

"Upon three charges," replied the marshal, taking a paper from his pocket. "For permitting a prisoner to escape, for desertion, and treason."

"Deserting!" exclaimed Clayborne. "Great heavens, I was captured by the enemy while trying

to run the Vicksburg batteries, and you call that 'desertion!' This is infamous! Who dares accuse me of treason!"

"I can't answer any questions, Captain Clayborne. My duty is merely to take you into custody wherever found," said the provost marshal dryly.

CHAPTER XVII

ULYSSES TAKES HIS TROY

THE unexpected and the inevitable had come to pass: unexpected, because the sanguine courage of the South could never see defeat until staring it in the face; inevitable, because from the moment Grant's army had crossed the Mississippi it had gone forward to decisive victory.

The modern Ulysses had at last taken Troy, and Major Sharp's office had witnessed the paroling of thirty thousand Southern prisoners. The North went wild with excitement over this and another great victory; and from that fourth day of July when Vicksburg surrendered and the battle of Gettysburg was fought, the tide turned in the fortunes of the Union.

General Ulysses S. Grant, with Dame Fortune showering her golden favors upon him, with an exultant nation in a delirium of joy crowning him with the laurel wreath, was the same imperturbable, unobtrusive gentleman who had suffered adversity and borne unjust accusations with silent and heroic fortitude.

He took this ebullition of emotion at its true value; he heard with a quaint smile of amusement

how his name was honored by being bestowed on every kind of progeny from babies — black and white — to kittens and puppies; and he accepted the Sunday-school medals, university degrees, houses, swords, and horses as the customary tributes to newly made heroes. He had won success. He had silenced his traducers. Once for all he had stilled ignorant criticism. He had won the lasting confidence of the people, and he now set his determined face in the direction of the further work at hand.

He was seated in his headquarters writing letters and dispatches in his rapid, irregular hand when Benjamin Chesterfield entered. Without looking up, the general shifted his cigar and said cordially: "Well, Chesterfield, what is the news?"

"You are spoken of as a candidate for the presidency."

Grant laughed. "It also appears that without my knowledge I have been initiated into a large number of secret societies, and that half a hundred of the most distinguished social, literary, and artistic clubs of the country have honored me with membership. I certainly cannot consider any mention of my name in connection with the presidency at this time as serious."

"But it is serious, General; prominent politicians are mentioning your name, and many people throughout the country are asking whether you would not be an available candidate."

"Then such discussion should be stopped at

once," exclaimed Grant earnestly, looking up from his work. "There is only one man who should be thought of for the place, and that man is Abraham Lincoln. Not one straw should be allowed to stand in the way of his renomination." The general spoke with decision, and turned again to his writing. "I have just been made major-general in the regular service. Is that not enough honor for any man?" he added pleasantly.

"You have my warmest congratulations, General Grant," replied Chesterfield, "and you must not think my congratulations the less sincere because of my coming to you among the first to ask a favor."

Grant looked up inquiringly.

"A young friend of mine has got into trouble, and I want to help get him out; particularly as I was indirectly the instrument, although the innocent instrument, of bringing about the situation which led to his undoing."

"Who is the man?" asked Grant, who had again turned to the writing on the pine table before him.

"Captain Gordon Clayborne. He was held prisoner here in Vicksburg by the rebels. He escaped, and falling into the hands of the provost marshal, was arrested on the charge of treason."

"The War Department has ordered that Captain Clayborne be sent immediately to Washington, where he is to be tried by court-martial," answered General Grant abruptly.

"So I understand," replied Chesterfield, "but

I wish you would permit me to tell you a few facts, which probably do not appear in any report, and which are not likely to appear upon any of the records."

"Go ahead."

"You see there is a woman in the case. This Flora Dowd, which, by the way is not her real name, is a bewitching beauty with a voice like an angel. In reality she is a little devil. She is clever, too deuced clever for an ordinary mortal. Her ruling passion is her devotion to the cause she has espoused. To this she would sacrifice anything or anybody who came in her way. She has been in Memphis, St. Louis, even Washington. She has got any quantity of valuable information from our officers. I don't mean young boyish lieutenants and volunteer captains, but regular officers of the line have been captivated by her wiles. She can bring a hoary-headed old general to her feet, or wind a young subaltern around her finger as easily as she can eat an orange; and she can throw them away just as easily as she tosses aside the orange skin. Now this Captain Clayborne is a gallant young fellow, generous and warm-hearted, with certain ideas of chivalry which have been in his blood for generations. Unfortunately he had command of the boat which was bringing this fair and dangerous prisoner down the river. During the trip she worked upon his sympathies. She entered the plea of old friendship, bewitched him, ensnared him, got him under

her spell in such a way that he came to believe he was in honor bound to release her. That 's the whole story in a nutshell, General. The man will be convicted of the charge against him. Let him be pardoned and reinstated."

"I have no authority to exercise clemency in this case, Chesterfield. That rests with the President."

"The President is not very likely to refuse you anything just now."

General Grant sat a few moments in thought.

"I don't mind telling you, Chesterfield, I had been giving the subject some thought before you came in."

"Then you will do something for him?"

"I dislike very much to interfere in any personal way with the work of the War Department, but I have decided at least to see Captain Clayborne and to form my own opinion as to the extent of his guilt."

"I am sure that such an investigation will result favorably to Captain Clayborne," said Chesterfield with earnestness. "I hope you will not consider me officious in speaking of the matter."

"Not at all," answered the general pleasantly. "I am glad to get this additional light on the subject."

When the newspaper correspondent had left, General Grant turned to his orderly. "Send for Captain Gordon Clayborne."

On the table before the general was a letter.

It was an autograph letter from the President of the United States, and it spoke in warm-hearted, generous terms of the general's success, giving him unstinted credit for the victory he had won.

General Grant reread this letter carefully, and then taking up his pen, busied himself in writing the reply. While he was thus engaged Captain Clayborne was brought into the room. When he had finished writing, the general turned in his chair, and swinging one leg over the other in an easy attitude, looked attentively at the young man who stood there, erect and soldierly, yet with a certain easy grace and freedom from embarrassment which came to him by nature. He had just learned that he had been summoned to Washington. The thought of possible public disgrace burnt like hot iron within him. His spirit leaped up in resentment. He knew he could not endure such a punishment. Therefore it was in no humble frame of mind that he confronted the general in the loose blue coat and rusty hat, who sat looking at him intently out of his steel-blue eyes.

Success was dear to Gordon Clayborne, and he had failed. He was a man of true courage and ardent feeling, who held his life but lightly in the scale with honor or with duty. Touch his honor and you touched him to the quick. Accuse him of treachery and you drew forth fire.

His honor had called upon him to release a woman, — a mistaken idea of honor some might call it, yet it was his idea. His conscience acquitted

him of any serious wrong-doing. In his heart he felt he had not been disloyal to the nation. Therefore he returned the piercing gaze with the look of hauteur which upon occasion the Claybornes could so easily assume.

Grant, who never forgot a face, broke the silence by asking in his sharp, abrupt way, "Are you not the officer who commanded the company in a skirmish at La Grange a year ago last June?"

"I am, sir."

"A few months later, in an expedition across the Tennessee, did you not rescue an officer from drowning?"

Again Gordon bowed.

"Then all I have to say, Captain Clayborne, is that I do not believe that a man who conducted himself with such bravery as you did upon those occasions has been guilty of treason."

One timely word of sympathy, encouragement, or confidence may often change the current of a man's life.

Gordon had come into the presence of the commanding general in a reckless, desperate mood, which made him ripe for almost anything. A word of severity might have caused his proud spirit to burst forth in some retort or some overt act of insubordination which would have led to his complete ruin. The frank avowal of the general touched him. His hostility was completely disarmed. He did not make any immediate reply, but the mask of pride which he had worn dropped away.

"The War Department has ordered that you be sent to Washington," Grant went on abruptly.

A flush deepened on Gordon's cheek, his dark eyes flashed aggressively, and he threw back his head like a restive horse under a stinging lash. If he had spoken, it would have been to give some reply of defiance, but with an effort he held himself in check.

"If you will agree to go directly to Washington and to endeavor to subdue your feeling of pride and resentment, you shall go unaccompanied by any guard," continued the general quietly.

Gordon hesitated. He had made up his mind that he could never stand the disgrace of a court-martial and live, yet the generosity of the general moved him greatly.

"Let me give you a piece of advice," said the general dryly. "If you 've done anything which makes you amenable to discipline, make up your mind to face the music. If your conscience acquits you of any graver crime, so much the easier should it be for you."

"I give my parole," answered Gordon slowly, "and thank you for your confidence."

"Very well. You shall be relieved from restraint at once. You will start East to-night." Grant summoned his orderly, gave a few quick orders, and the interview closed with a brisk "Good-afternoon, Captain Clayborne."

As Clayborne left the room General Grant took up his pen and wrote rapidly a few lines, which he

folded and addressed to the chief executive of the nation. This letter he enclosed under cover to the newspaper correspondent, Chesterfield.

Clayborne walked out of headquarters with his heart warm with a deep regard for the man who had given such a generous testimony of his confidence.

As he walked through the battered streets of Vicksburg he saw many Confederate soldiers who were kept waiting in the city until their paroles could be made out and signed. The blue coats and the gray were freely intermingled, and men who for months had been opposing each other with bitter determination were seen seated together upon street corners, amicably playing euchre, or eating from the same loaf, while they discussed the campaign under the very shadow of walls so crippled with cannon-shot that they stood tottering upon their foundations.

Regina Bowie had returned, and remained in Vicksburg during all the evacuation.

Before the ink was dry on the terms of surrender, Regina had laid aside her coat of gray for a less marked costume. She could be of much greater service to her cause as a woman than as a prisoner of war, and as her name appeared upon no muster-roll, Miss Bowie bade adieu to her brass buttons, ceasing to be "major," to retire into the less obtrusive, but for the present more valuable, character of an attractive young woman dressed in black. Regina could change her character with her

gown, she could change an admirer as easily as she could take off a pair of gloves; but it would have been well-nigh impossible for her to have appeared in any rôle that did not include beauty and charm. Through the folds of her dark veil, Miss Bowie had seen worn-out, hungry soldiers throw down their arms, and surrender the city they had so long and so valiantly defended. The eyes behind that veil flashed with resentment, and the woman's hands were clinched as she witnessed this humiliating scene. She gave no further outward sign of her emotion, but the fire within her heart burned fiercely. Thus Regina, remaining in Vicksburg after the surrender, had been able to inform herself upon many subjects of value and interest. Among other things she learned that Captain Clayborne was held in arrest under the charge of having permitted some prisoners to escape. It was therefore with surprise that she saw him enjoying apparent freedom. She felt sure that her information had been correct, yet here was an apparent contradiction of it. She smelled a mystery here, and resolved to discover what it was.

Meanwhile Gordon made the preparations for his departure to Washington that night. A steamer would take him to Memphis, whence he could go by rail to the East. It was with varied emotions that he stepped aboard the boat which lay at the wharf, ready to steam securely up the river, past the silent and now friendly guns, which had given him such a disastrous welcome a few weeks before.

He had no sooner seen his baggage deposited in his stateroom than the shining face of Apollo appeared at the door.

"Well, you black rascal, where did you come from, and why did you run off and leave me so unceremoniously the other night when I was in the hands of the provost marshal?" Clayborne demanded with affected sternness.

"Lawd, Marse Claybun, runnin' jis' cums nat'ral to dis nigger," was the cheerful reply. "I cud n't do no good by stayin', and ma black hide wuf consid'ble to me, so I jis' run off. But I fin' I 'se a free nigger now, and I ain't afeared of de provost marshal or no one else no more," and Apollo drew himself up proudly.

"Well, you 'free nigger,' what are you going to do now?" asked Clayborne, laughing good humoredly.

"I 'se a-goin' to wuk on de riber boats for the res' of ma life, and I 'll do eberyting I kin for Marse Claybun."

CHAPTER XVIII

BEFORE THE COURT

During the few days which were occupied by the journey between Vicksburg and Washington, Gordon Clayborne had ample time for thought, and to fortify his mind to meet the ordeal through which he must pass. He had determined to face the consequences of his action with self-restraint and coolness; but when the time for the court-martial actually arrived, and he found himself facing the array of officers who had been called to serve upon the board, Clayborne felt his stoicism somewhat shaken. He was to be tried before the highest tribunal of the United States army; and the thirteen members of the board, attired in full-dress uniform, formed an imposing body of men. They were dignified in bearing, and of impartial mind; their sole purpose was to do their duty.

The accused was also in full dress, with the exception of his sword. Outwardly he looked as if he had been summoned to a review; but there was a light in his eye and a glow on his cheek which told that beneath the surface the hot blood was surging. The minutes went by, and the preparations for the trial proceeded with due deliberation

and solemnity. Besides the board of court-martial, the counsel and the witnesses, there were some twoscore persons in the court-room. They were all connected with the army. Among them Clayborne at once recognized the thin, clear-cut features of General Ware. The general's face was stern, and looked coldly at Gordon, who, stung to the quick by the cutting severity in those cold gray eyes, turned proudly away. How different was the general's severe attitude to that of his daughter! In Gordon's pocket was a note from her, a few hurriedly written lines, yet they made his heart warm towards the generous-minded girl who had written them, and even made him look upon the general's coldness with more indulgence.

"I have just learned," the letter ran, "that you are in Washington and in trouble; that you are to be tried by a court-martial upon a horrible charge. It was wrong of you not to let me know about this yourself. I have only time to write these few lines to reach you before the trial, but you must know that I do not for one moment believe you guilty, or consider you other than a victim of some terrible misunderstanding which will now be explained. If I wrote volumes I could not say more than this; and that I believe implicitly that you could never be guilty of any dishonorable action."

Gordon had earnestly wished to see Miss Ware, but with the cloud of such a serious charge hanging over him he had shrunk from approaching her.

He supposed she was ignorant of his presence in Washington and of the unfortunate affair which had brought him there. Who her informant had been he did not know, nor could he guess just what the information was that she had received; but the tone of the letter disclosed to him such a nobleness of soul in the young girl that he felt his heart glow afresh every time he thought of the generous words she had sent to him.

The day before the court-martial, as General Ware was about to leave his house to go to the War Department, he had received a call from a sandy-bearded young man in a well-worn uniform. "General Ware," he said, "I am Lieutenant Brainard. I am in Washington on official business, and I wish to have a few minutes' conversation with you."

"Meet me at my office in half an hour, Lieutenant," replied General Ware courteously.

"With your permission I should like to speak to you now, and also say a few words to your daughter."

"Upon what subject, may I inquire?"

"Upon an official matter of some importance."

General Ware was a man of few words. Bowing slightly, he sent a servant to summon his daughter. She appeared almost immediately.

"Marjorie," said the father, "this is Lieutenant Brainard, who has just come to Washington from Vicksburg. He has something to say to us."

Any one fresh from the theatre of war excited the utmost interest.

"I am glad to see you, Lieutenant Brainard," said Marjorie, with a cordial ring to her voice. Her heart beat rapidly, for she felt that some important news must be in store for them.

"General Ware," said Brainard, looking closely at the girl, "I knew your son; the resemblance is strong."

The general's immobile countenance gave no sign of the emotion he felt; but a look of pain came quickly across Marjorie's face. From the time she had first learned that Frank was missing she had clung to the hope that he might be alive, although a prisoner; but since the fall of Vicksburg the light of that hope had been fading fast, and Lieutenant Brainard's words only reminded her of the loss.

Brainard saw the shade on Miss Ware's face and went on hurriedly: —

"I sympathize with you in your grief. I was on the River Queen when she was captured, but I was more fortunate than poor Francis Ware. I not only escaped, but I am the instrument of bringing to book the man who was responsible for the disaster."

"Who was responsible for it?"

"Do you not know who commanded the expedition?" he asked, eyeing her closely.

"Captain Clayborne commanded it, but I do not see how that makes him responsible for the disaster," she replied with spirit, although there was a tremble in her voice.

"Do you know that Clayborne is to be tried by court-martial?"

"No! I had not heard it," she replied, making no attempt to conceal the shock the news gave her.

"The trial is to be held to-morrow. I have come to see you about the case."

"What have I to do with it?" she asked in a tone of surprise.

"You have known Mr. Clayborne for some time, have you not?"

"Well?"

"Have you ever corresponded with him?"

"I still do not see your reason for asking these questions," she replied.

"Miss Ware, I want you to tell me frankly, if this Clayborne was responsible for the loss of the River Queen, was responsible for the loss of your brilliant brother, was guilty of treason to the United States government, would you wish to see him shielded? Would you not wish to have him punished?"

"Shield him? No!" she cried. "I would not shield my own brother if he were an enemy to my country!"

"Now, Miss Ware, while you have been in Washington has Mr. Clayborne ever in any way encouraged you to write letters to him on political matters?"

The color flew to her cheeks as she exclaimed hotly, "Lieutenant Brainard, do you dare imply" —

"My dear Miss Ware, I insinuate nothing. I do not think for a moment that you would willingly lend yourself to any such practice, but I do know how much a clever and unscrupulous person can take advantage of a trustful and unsuspecting one. I do know that you are in a position at times to overhear things which might be of great interest and value to our enemies. It would have been so natural to put them on paper when writing an innocent letter to a friend. Now if you have any letters from Captain Clayborne which solicited such communications from you, they might have a bearing upon the present case."

Marjorie Ware listened thoughtfully until he had finished, then she replied calmly: "If Captain Clayborne were guilty of disloyalty and treason, if he had treacherously endeavored to make use of my friendship in order to obtain information and betray it to the enemy, I would use every effort to see him punished as he deserved."

"I knew you would feel like this," said Brainard.

"Yes, you might have known that I would feel like this, Mr. Brainard; and you will be glad to hear that there was not a line in any of Mr. Clayborne's letters which could lay him open to such a suspicion."

Brainard's face fell with disappointment. "Thank you, Miss Ware, for speaking so freely; we have a chain of evidence that the man is a traitor. I was in hopes that you would be able to help strengthen it."

"I do not believe that Mr. Clayborne is a traitor," the girl flashed out. "He may, through rashness and over-daring, be responsible for the loss of the River Queen, but that does not permit you to call him a traitor until he is proven so."

"I stand corrected, Miss Ware, until to-morrow," replied Brainard quietly.

"I bid you good-day, sir," said Marjorie haughtily, sweeping from the room.

During this dialogue General Ware had remained seated, a passive spectator, with his clear eyes fixed intently on both of the speakers.

When his daughter had gone he addressed a few questions to Brainard. The latter answered him freely and a few minutes' earnest conversation ensued.

"The court-martial is set down for to-morrow?" inquired the general, as the lieutenant arose to go.

"Yes, sir, at ten o'clock."

After Lieutenant Brainard's departure General Ware sought his daughter, and taking her face between his hands looked down in her eyes.

"How many letters have been exchanged between you and this Captain Clayborne?" he asked abruptly.

"A dozen or perhaps more; possibly twenty," was her reply, while she answered his gaze unflinchingly.

"You did not show any of them to me," he continued reproachfully.

"You knew I wrote to him," she replied evasively.

"I knew one or two letters had passed between you. I did not think there was anything more than that," he said with a sigh.

"There was no concealment on my part," Marjorie said quietly.

Her father passed his hand caressingly over the soft brown hair. "Were they love letters?" he inquired gently.

The color came to her cheeks. "No," she replied hesitatingly — "merely letters of friendship."

"Letters of friendship," he repeated, turning abruptly away.

"Captain Clayborne has never mentioned love to me, and I am sure I never have to him," Marjorie said demurely.

"The man is a villain!" cried her father with more heat than he had ever shown in his life. "He has made love to my daughter surreptitiously! He has betrayed his trust, and is responsible for the death of my son! But he has reached the end of his rope at last and he shall suffer for it!"

The blood left the young woman's face and flew to her heart. "Why do you call him a villain before he has been found guilty — before you have even heard the testimony against him!" she cried passionately.

"Because he has acted the part of one, and I believe him guilty of the charge brought against him!" exclaimed General Ware with equal warmth; "and

whatever the result of the trial, you must never hold any communication with that man again."

"Is that your command?" asked Marjorie.

"It is my earnest wish," said the father.

"I do not believe that he has been guilty of anything dishonorable," said the daughter proudly, "and until I do I cannot be bound by your wishes."

"I will hear the testimony at the court-martial," said General Ware with more composure. "You shall hear the result from my lips. Now I must go to the department."

Marjorie Ware went to her own room, and seating herself at the table wrote a few impulsive lines with nervous hand.

Gordon Clayborne received her note before the court convened, and with this missive placed in his breast pocket he was able to look upon his accuser with some degree of composure.

The indictment was brief and explicit. He was charged: —

1. With permitting prisoners to escape.
2. With furnishing information to the enemy.
3. With treason.

The man who had instigated the charges was William Brainard. He was actuated by no malice. With regret he had come to the belief that Gordon Clayborne was a traitor, and as such he wished to see him punished. He wished to see him made an example of. He wanted him put where he could do no further injury. Brainard was the principal witness against the accused, although his testimony

was corroborated in many details by several of the soldiers who were on board the River Queen.

With a superb disregard of his legal rights, Gordon Clayborne had refused counsel, and he now rose to speak in his own defense. He addressed the board in a respectful manner, yet there was a scornful curl to his lip as he referred to the accusation against him; there was a flash of indignation in his dark eyes as he looked into the face of his accuser. He spoke throughout with calm self-restraint, yet the clear, musical cadence of his voice filled the court-room, each word being distinctly audible to all present.

"I am accused of treason," he began slowly, "the gravest charge upon which a soldier can be tried. I may perhaps be more open to such a suspicion because of my birth. I am a Virginian." There was a proud ring in his voice as he said these words, and a proud though unconscious lifting of the chin. "When the war began I held a commission in the United States army. I deemed it my duty to retain that commission. What it cost me to come to that decision is not of moment here. I did make it and I have served the flag to the best of my ability.

"It is true that I allowed one of the prisoners to escape." Subdued murmurs of excitement ran through the court-room. The avowal had been sudden and unexpected. Gordon looked about him with some surprise. "That part of the accusation is perfectly true; but, gentlemen, it was

with no treasonable designs. She was a woman," he continued gently; "a woman who had claims upon my friendship. I was bound in honor to release her." There was a chivalrous light in his eyes as he spoke, and he looked full at General Ware. "I was bound in honor to release her," he went on simply, "but I do not evade responsibility on that account. Whatever the consequences, I should have done it just the same. For what I have done I am willing to be judged and punished. But I am also accused of betraying a transport of troops and supplies, of setting fire to a steamer, and running it into the hands of the enemy. This is false!" For the only time he raised his voice till it rang sharply through the room. Then, speaking in a lower tone, slowly and deliberately he went on: "That the River Queen was set on fire from within is possible. I have my own suspicions." Instinctively he looked in the direction of General Ware. The old soldier's face was stern; no sign of sympathy or belief shone in those cold, gray eyes. Yet Gordon hardly noticed him; he seemed to see the softer blue eyes of a young woman, to hear her utter the words of trust she had written him. The chivalry of his nature dominated him. He hesitated for a moment, then turning towards the board. "But, gentlemen, suspicions have no standing in a court of law. There has been no evidence here to prove that any one destroyed the River Queen. There has been no evidence to prove that I was in the service of the

Confederates. I demand an acquittal upon these two charges!" and with a gesture of the hand as if he swept the accusations from him, he resumed his seat. A hum of subdued but earnest conversation again agitated the court-room. Clayborne looked about him with that outward calmness which pride and spirit engender, while the board slowly rose, and with dignity retired to consider its verdict.

Gordon Clayborne was right. There had been little evidence to prove him guilty of treason. But although he might be acquitted of the last two and most serious charges, would not the board be obliged to find him guilty upon his own admission of having allowed a prisoner to escape?

Doubts even as to his innocence on the last two counts were entertained by some of the members of the board, and this uncertainty in their minds caused the debate to be long and earnest.

Gordon had been sent under guard to his hotel, to await the result of the verdict. If he were found guilty, the sentence would be severe. Proud by nature, he shrank from going into the street and through the hotel lobby. Yet as he did so, none of those who elbowed him in the crowd held their heads higher, or walked the thoroughfare with a greater appearance of indifference. For two hours Clayborne remained thus; in deep and bitter reflection, dwelling upon the mistakes, the injustices, and the misfortunes of his career, until he finally reached that recklessness of mood which is particularly dangerous for men of his temperament.

The guard entered the room. "A gentleman has permission to see you, sir."

"I wish to see nobody," replied Clayborne peremptorily.

The man said nothing, but dropped a card upon the table and retired.

A few moments later Gordon picked up the bit of pasteboard, read it, thrust it into his pocket; then rising suddenly from his chair, he went towards the bell-rope. Before he had an opportunity to ring, the door swung open, and Benjamin Chesterfield walked breezily into the room.

"I received your message, so I came up," he laughed, holding out his hand.

A faint flush came to Gordon's face. "I know it was absurd of me, and I was just going to send for you after reading the name on the card," he answered, taking the proffered hand. "I suppose I must get used to seeing people, but it comes hard at present."

"Well, this comes of being taken in by a woman," said Chesterfield with great cheerfulness, taking a seat on the end of the bed.

Clayborne made no answer.

"You had a fine career, and now it is ruined, and for what? for a woman who used you just as she would use an umbrella, — to get in out of the rain."

Gordon scowled grimly. "I was bound in honor, Chesterfield, to act as I did, and by Heaven I would do it again, though I ruined a dozen careers. I

did not think that you were the kind of man to strike another when he is down," he added reproachfully. Chesterfield shot him a quick glance from under his heavy eyebrows.

"Neither am I, Clayborne. That was only my way of showing my sympathy."

"I wish you would show it in some other way, then," retorted Gordon.

Chesterfield rang the bell. "Bring up two mint juleps," he ordered the attendant, and the darky disappeared quickly to do his bidding.

Chesterfield threw a long leg over the footboard. The day was warm. Clayborne took off his coat and waistcoat, and, sitting astride a chair, faced him. Neither spoke for a few moments. Chesterfield swung one large foot lazily, while Gordon drummed with his fingers on the chair-back.

The darky arrived with the iced drink clinking in the glasses. Chesterfield drew up the table, and both men took a deep draught.

"Clayborne," began the newspaper correspondent when they were alone once more, "there is something I very much want to know." A moment's silence followed. Chesterfield resumed his easy position upon the bed. "I hesitate to pry into any man's affairs, but there is one question I want to ask you."

"You have my permission to ask it," replied Clayborne courteously.

"I have not known you for such a very long period, but my friendship for you is sincere. I desire

your confidence for your own sake. You may of course withhold it if you see fit," Chesterfield went on with an engaging frankness of manner.

Clayborne looked at him inquiringly.

"Dash it all, man, I'll come to the point at once!" cried the newspaper correspondent, rising to his feet. "Are you in love with Flora Dowd — Regina Bowie, or whatever her name is? Are you infatuated with her?"

Gordon looked at his friend for a few moments in silence.

"No," he answered quietly. "I am not."

"Are you quite sure?" exclaimed Chesterfield, taking the other man by the arm.

"I am sure," was the reply.

"Thank Heaven," was the pious ejaculation of the bearded newspaper man, and he drew a document from his pocket. "Clayborne," he said slowly, "I have here an order for the dismissal of the charge against you, and for your reinstatement in the army with your old rank, but I did not feel that I could give it to you until I was positive that you were in no way infatuated with the woman whom you allowed to escape."

Clayborne felt his heart leap as the paper touched his hand.

"Chesterfield, I always knew you for a true-hearted gentleman, but I could not expect such a service even from you. How did you obtain it?" was all he said.

CHAPTER XIX

LOVE AND DOUBT

Benjamin Chesterfield was a man who would have moved the earth for a friend. He was the kind of man who would travel to the end of the world on a service of friendship, and never give the matter of his own comfort or convenience a thought.

So he had hastened to Washington on behalf of Clayborne. After some delay he had succeeded in gaining the ear of the President, had presented a letter from General Grant, and had supplemented this so eloquently with his own arguments as finally to obtain from the generous chief magistrate a pardon to be availed of at the discretion of the correspondent himself. "For," reasoned Chesterfield, "if Clayborne is still infatuated with that woman it would be useless to trust him, and I shall regretfully let him go to perdition."

But Chesterfield found his friend sound in mind; he saw that he was still worthy of trust; and Gordon Clayborne was able to walk out of the hotel a new man.

The world is very young and fair at twenty-five, and Gordon Clayborne's spirits were light as air

as he walked up Pennsylvania Avenue. The day was hot and stifling, hospital ambulances heavy with the suffering wounded rattled through the streets. Care-worn faces passed him at every turn, — the anxious statesman, the crippled soldier, the bereaved widow, all carrying their share of the burden of the times. Yet vigorous youth noted none of these. He saw a blue-eyed child smiling in the sunlight. He saw a pretty girl on the doorstep of a shop, and smiled at her, too, as he passed jauntily by. She returned the greeting, for it must have been a straight-laced one indeed who would not unbend a little from her maidenly reserve at a debonair glance from Gordon Clayborne's eye. He heard the merry laugh of some children at their play, and the more boisterous notes of soldiers drinking at a bar. He heard and saw the lighter side of life ; the dark and serious touched him not, for the blood of youth was warm within him. Clayborne was going back to the field, but before he went he had one mission of high importance to fulfil. It was doubtless the thought of this which gave an added elasticity to his step and a brilliancy to his eye as he walked briskly up H street and stopped before a neat-looking brick house.

Marjorie Ware was preparing to go to the hospital. She had just donned the plain and trim attire of a nurse and stood before the glass to put on her bonnet, when Gordon Clayborne's name was brought up to her. Her hands trembled as

they tied the strings of her bonnet under her chin. For a few moments she stood debating what course of action she should follow. Her father had told her all that had taken place at the court-martial. He had repeated to her, in his quiet, passionless manner, the charge, the testimony, the confession. She had heard him with bewilderment and awe. His deliberate statements carried conviction with them. She knew her father must speak the truth, and although in her heart she tried to doubt him, she could not. And if her father's words were true, how could Gordon Clayborne be worthy of any consideration? She resolved that she must never communicate with him again. She regretted the impulsive letter which she had sent him. She tried to banish him from her mind twenty times that day, and thought she would never see him again, and now he was in the house waiting to see her. The announcement came to her with a shock. Her first impulse was to refuse to see him. Meanwhile Gordon, in the little sitting-room below, awaited the appearance of the lady, his ear alert for her step upon the stairs, and at every sound that reached him his eyes were raised expectantly towards the door. The possibility that she would not come did not occur to him.

Marjorie came swiftly downstairs. She was due at the hospital in a few minutes, and the thought came to her that she could pass out of the front door and hurry down the street to her work, thus avoiding Clayborne; but when she reached the issue

she was unable to resist the strong impulse which seemed to force her to turn and enter the sitting-room. She stood for a moment on the threshold, surveying him with an expression of great sadness in her eyes. Gordon came swiftly across the room and took her by the hand, saying, "Miss Ware, I thank you most deeply for the letter you sent me. It reached me at a time when life seemed darkest."

She gave his face a searching look of inquiry, at the same time trying to withdraw her hand. He led her to a chair, and sat down near her.

"I do not understand you," she said coldly.

"Why, little comrade, you stood by me nobly when everything seemed to be going against me. Do you know," he continued radiantly, "for a time, before I heard from you, I feared that you thought me guilty of the charge of treason."

"Are you quite innocent?" Marjorie burst out suddenly.

His eyes flashed at her in surprise. "If you doubted me why did you write me that letter?" he inquired sternly.

"Because I did believe in you then," she said sadly.

"Little comrade, you must believe in me always."

"You must not call me by that name," she said with quiet firmness.

"It was understood that as long as the war lasted you were to be my little comrade," he continued gently, "and that after the war" —

She interrupted him suddenly. "Tell me first that the accusation against you was untrue. Tell me that you had some strong reason for not denying an unjust charge. Tell me this with your own lips and I will believe you."

"On my honor I am guiltless of all conspiracy against the government," he said earnestly.

"Of all conspiracy against the government." She repeated the words as if to get their full meaning.

"Yes," he replied, "I want you to believe that. I want you to trust me. During all this past year your letters and the thought of you have been my inspiration, my star. I would rather lose the trust of the whole world than yours."

"When you speak like that it is hard to doubt you, but I must understand you absolutely. Is it true that you allowed that woman, that Flora Dowd, to escape? If you tell me that you did not allow her to go free, but for some reason, known only to yourself, you did not deny a false accusation, I shall believe you." She spoke almost imploringly.

He hesitated for a moment, then said quietly, "I alone am responsible for her escape."

"You allowed a prisoner to escape!" she exclaimed, "and yet you ask me to believe in you?"

"I let a woman go free," he assented.

"You liberated a spy — a person who had been working injury to the Union, a scheming, intriguing spy — and yet you ask me to trust you."

"You must remember she was a woman," he repeated. "I alone stood between her and her freedom. I could not hold her a prisoner."

"Mr. Clayborne," said Marjorie, "I had a brother on the River Queen. He lost his life while at his post."

Gordon winced, but looked into her face earnestly, attempting to offer no explanation.

The tears were in Marjorie's eyes. "Although I weep for him," she said mournfully, "the knowledge that he died bravely, in the defense of the flag, is a great balm to my grief."

"Miss Ware," said Gordon quietly, "because I came safely through the River Queen disaster you should not impugn my courage. Death does not always come to those who seek it."

"I have never doubted your courage, Captain Clayborne, never, but," —

"But you doubt me — you have said so."

"On your own admission you stand convicted of one breach of trust," she exclaimed with a catch in her voice. "How am I to be sure you are not guilty of another?"

"You do not believe that I betrayed the River Queen?" he cried vehemently; "you do not hold me responsible for your brother's" — he hesitated, then ended quietly, "death?"

"No — no," she protested. "I accuse you of nothing. I only say I am in doubt, in terrible doubt" —

"You shall doubt me no longer!" he cried pas-

sionately. "You have written me that you believe in me, and I shall hold you to that. I swear to you that I did my best to bring the River Queen past the batteries. Fate was against me, and I failed. I swear to you that I tried in vain to save your brother" —

"To save my brother — how?" she cried.

Gordon looked searchingly into her eyes. He recalled the words she had spoken but the moment before about her brother, and shook his head sadly. "It was in vain. Fate was against me. Miss Ware," Gordon continued, "I am going away — I have been reinstated, and am going back to the army. If I live I shall certainly find you again, but the uncertainties of war are such that it is not bombast on my part to say that we may never meet again. Before I go I want to feel that I stand in your esteem where I stood before. I want you to agree to write me just as you have done in the past."

"You are asking too much," Marjorie replied. "I cannot."

"Why can't you?"

"Because in the past I had such confidence in you. I believed in you so completely. I felt such a sincere friendship for you, that I wrote you with great unreserve. I can never do so again."

"Won't you please try?" he pleaded.

"It would be useless, Captain Clayborne. The element of doubt would always exist in my mind; it would stand a barrier between us."

"Put aside that doubt," he said fervently. "I would rather have you believe in me — I would rather have your trust than that of the whole world beside."

"I would give much to be able to drive the doubt away," she replied truthfully, "but there is so much I cannot understand about you."

She turned towards him with an expression of great earnestness on her sweet face. Although dressed in the plain garb of a nurse, she looked prettier than ever in Gordon's eyes, with the color of excitement in her cheeks, and her soft golden-brown hair tucked back under her bonnet, whose strings had been hastily tied into rather a coquettish bow under her white chin.

"Marjorie," cried Gordon impetuously, "for months I have cherished your regard as the dearest object of my heart." Again he took her hand. She tried to withdraw it, but he held it firmly, saying, "I knew I should tell you some day. I thought it would be after the war, but I must tell you now — I love you" —

"I beg of you, do not tell me that now," she pleaded, struggling in vain to take away the hand.

"I have long known that I loved you," he went on passionately; "when I received your letter I knew that I adored you."

Marjorie tore her hand free, and rising to her feet stood before him.

"Why do you tell me this?" she cried vehemently.

"Because it is the truth, Marjorie," he said. "You must have known it in your secret heart for a long time."

"I do not know it," she exclaimed with agitation.

"Yes, you do, Marjorie. You are too truthful to stoop to such prevarication. You cannot look at me and say you did not know I loved you. You cannot look straight at me with those frank, clear eyes of yours and say you do not care for me."

Marjorie hesitated, then burst forth impetuously: "No, I do not understand you. At one time I did think you cared for me, and I held you in very high regard. I will not deny it even now, for it was true."

"I have not lost that regard yet, Miss Ware, and I intend to keep it," said Gordon gently.

"Where confidence is shaken regard cannot remain, Captain Clayborne," said Marjorie seriously.

"You say you do not understand me, Marjorie. Cannot you understand me when I say I love you?" He uttered the words quietly, but there was a convincing earnestness in his manner that could not fail to have its effect upon the young girl.

She looked into his eyes, saying in her straightforward way, "I do not understand you, because you have been accused of permitting this Flora Dowd to escape, and you admit that it is true."

"It is true, Marjorie, but I love you. That is not difficult to understand."

She hesitated for an instant, then spoke rapidly: "They testified that you made love to her. They implied that there was — that there was an affectionate understanding between you. Is that true?"

"It is not true."

"Will you tell me that you have never made love to her?" she asked with almost a note of entreaty in her voice. "Tell me this, on your honor, Mr. Clayborne, and I will believe you."

"Why do you ask me this?" he cried passionately. "It is you I love, and you only."

She stood by the table — one hand nervously opening and closing a book that lay there. Her face was pale. She looked at him as she tried to read his inmost thoughts.

"It is just that which I cannot understand," she replied. "If you have never made love to her you would not hesitate. It would be so easy to answer me."

"I will repeat that I love you, Marjorie, and you only," he cried ardently, seizing the fingers that were tremblingly fluttering the pages of the book, and pressing them to his lips.

"You made love to her, and now you make love to me," she exclaimed scornfully. She did not try to free her hand from his, but stood passionless.

"My dear little girl," he whispered tenderly, "do you not know it was before I ever saw you? Will you not believe that I love you devotedly, that I adore you with all my soul? My love for you is my religion — it can never change. Can-

not you feel that I speak the truth? Can't you believe me?"

"I believe in nothing," she exclaimed bitterly.

"You shall believe in me," Gordon said earnestly.

The door opened, and General Ware entered the room. His keen gray eyes looked from his daughter to Gordon searchingly, but his immobile face gave no sign of emotion or surprise. Without noticing Marjorie's agitation, he bowed stiffly to Gordon, saying, "Allow me to congratulate you, Captain Clayborne, upon your prompt reinstatement in the army. When do you start for the West?"

Gordon recovered himself immediately, and replied with easy grace, "Thank you, General Ware. I have been transferred to the Army of the Potomac. I expect to start to-morrow morning."

The general bowed once more. "In case I do not see you again let me wish you good-by," he said, giving Clayborne a cold, expressionless hand.

"Again I thank you, General Ware," replied Gordon cordially. Then turning toward Marjorie he said, "I shall not say good-by to you, Miss Ware, because I shall hope to see you again before I go."

Marjorie did not answer.

The general did not speak.

"I shall go early to-morrow morning, but I shall call to see you this evening," Gordon said in a low voice. "Do not refuse to see me."

There was nothing for him to do but to take his leave, which he did politely. Outside the front door he found, to his surprise, that he was carrying the little volume which Marjorie had been holding. He stood for a moment looking down the street, which lay quiet under the hot noonday sun; then he put the book into his pocket and walked slowly away.

In the little sitting-room General Ware went up to his daughter, and with a tenderness no one would have believed was in him kissed her on the forehead.

That evening Clayborne dined with Chesterfield at the hotel. He was apparently in high spirits, talking and laughing continually; but he never for a moment lost count of the minutes, and no sooner did the hands of the clock point to half past seven than he bade his friend good-night, jumped into a carriage, and was driven rapidly to H Street.

The house was dark, and when the door opened Gordon saw with some misgiving that the light in the hallway was turned low and a lamp burned dimly in the sitting-room where he had stood a few hours before. Gordon did not remain long in doubt. The colored servant who answered his ring told him that Miss Ware had gone away in a carriage with her father before dinner, and he did not know when they would return.

Gordon looked at the man closely and saw he was telling only half the truth. He understood the race perfectly. In two minutes he learned all

the darky had to tell. It was meagre enough. He had overheard General Ware tell Miss Elizabeth that they would be back about ten.

"Who was Miss Elizabeth?"

"General Ware's sister."

"Was Miss Elizabeth at home?"

Miss Elizabeth was at home; she appeared at this moment upon the scene. Gordon gave her one quick glance and saw that any hope in that direction was out of the question.

The general himself might have stood before him, — the same keen gray eye, the same stern face with tightly compressed lips. Tall, angular, uncompromising, Miss Elizabeth took Gordon in at a glance, then without addressing him spoke to the negro. "David, if the gentleman has been answered, close the door. The night air affects my throat."

"In what direction did their carriage go?" Gordon asked in a low voice, slipping a coin into David's hand.

"Eh, what?" ejaculated Miss Elizabeth, pricking up her ears. "David, shut the door at once. We can have no inquisitives prying here."

The darky rolled his eyes and pointed north. The door closed and left Gordon on the step.

"Sour old maid!" he muttered to himself, going slowly down the steps.

"As nice appearing young man as ever was. What a pity things can't be as they ought to be," murmured Miss Elizabeth on her side of the door,

as she retired to her bedroom to await her brother's return. She was devoted to him and his interests, and she sat for some minutes thinking over the recent episode.

"Where shall I drive you to, sir?" asked the cabman as Gordon stood meditating on the curb.

"Down the street slowly," was the reply, as he got into the vehicle.

Here he busied himself in thought. In the correspondence which had passed between Marjorie and him, she had told him many details of her daily life. He had heard of her dining at the homes of a number of friends. He tried to recall some of their names to his mind. To his intense chagrin he could think of only one. It was one which had been repeated several times. There was a slight chance that the Wares were to-night dining with this friend. Clayborne was a man to let no chance slip by him. He went to a hotel, hurriedly consulted a directory, and then was driven rapidly to —— Street.

Clayborne was right in his guess. The Wares had dined at the house of Mrs. Worthington. As the front door opened, Gordon heard the measured tones of the general's voice coming from the drawing-room. Through a half-opened door Gordon caught the glint of an evening dress, as a woman passed across the room. He thought it was Marjorie.

To him the most important thing in the world at that crisis in his affair was to see her alone.

He was unacquainted with Mrs. Worthington; the general was antagonistic; he was uncertain as to Marjorie's own state of mind towards him. It was that very uncertainty which lent a desperation to the situation, and he was resolved to obtain a private interview with the young lady if it could be accomplished by strategy. To have his name announced would perhaps have been more intrepid, but it would certainly have defeated the object of his desire. He could think of but one course to pursue; it was to excite the interest and sympathy of the lady of the house, and throw himself upon her mercy. He felt in his pocket and drew out a card which bore Chesterfield's name, and giving it to the colored servant, requested him to take it to his mistress, stepped into the reception room upon the other side of the hall, and coolly waited the result. This was not only carrying the war into the enemy's country, it was attempting to corrupt the allies of the opponent; but if ever the end justifies the means it is in affairs of love. Mrs. Worthington came into the room with a look of inquiry upon her face. This look deepened to one of surprise as the unknown gentleman closed the door and told her who he was and what he wanted.

As soon as he caught sight of Mrs. Worthington's wholesome, kindly face, Gordon felt his self-assurance return; but it was no easy task to which he had set himself, however. For fifteen minutes he pleaded earnestly. Mrs. Worthington was loyal to her friend, the general; but there are two ways

of looking at all matters of this kind, and it may be taken for granted that Gordon's case did not suffer in his presentation of it. The man who cannot plead eloquently under such circumstances must expect to lose.

But if Gordon Clayborne was a man of resource and persistence, the general was an old campaigner. He thought that in taking his daughter out to dine he could avoid a visit from Clayborne, which to the general, at least, would not be welcome; but like the wary general he was, wishing to keep himself informed as to the movements of his enemy, he had left instructions with his sister that if Clayborne came to the house and showed an inclination to return or any inquisitiveness as to their whereabouts, he, General Ware, was to be informed. Perhaps all these precautions were unnecessary, for Marjorie herself had resolved not to see Gordon a second time; but then again the experienced know that the strongest resolutions are sometimes overcome by persistence. The general had resolved to take no risks.

In this case the old soldier proved himself an able tactician, and his sister showed herself a worthy lieutenant. After sitting quietly in thought for some minutes, she came to the conclusion that if her brother were informed of the fact that the wolf had appeared, her own mind would be easier; so she put on her shawl, tied her bonnet strings firmly under her chin, took an alpaca umbrella in her hand as an effective weapon of defense against

night prowlers, and set out to put the general on his guard.

Imagine the good woman's apprehension when, upon approaching Mrs. Worthington's house, she saw the cause of her present nocturnal adventure standing calmly before the door, waiting for it to be opened, as naturally as if he were expected. A few minutes later Miss Elizabeth was also inside the house, and in earnest conversation with her brother.

How slight a word can throw a man from the height of expectancy to the depths of dejection! Clayborne had won Mrs. Worthington over to his side. He had shown her how entirely dependent upon her generous assistance were his life's happiness, and without doubt the happiness of one whose welfare was of still greater concern to him. Together they had agreed how a private interview between Marjorie and himself could be arranged. The kind-hearted woman had left him alone for a few moments, during which he collected himself for the meeting, and marshaled all his arguments, while his pulse beat high.

Mrs. Worthington returned with the grave announcement that the general had suddenly been summoned home, and that at this moment he and his daughter were waiting in the hall to bid their hostess good-night. It was a stunning blow for Gordon. Although his heart was like lead, he did not forget to thank the lady who had befriended him. Then, to her surprise, he accompanied her

into the hallway. Going straight up to the general, he said cordially, "Good-by, General Ware, I trust we shall meet again under more favorable circumstances. Mrs. Worthington, I am your most grateful and obedient servant." Then turning toward Miss Ware, he said in a low voice, into which there crept a tender accent he did not attempt to disguise, "Good-by, Marjorie. You see I have found you, after all — if for nothing else to return this volume of Emerson, which I inadvertently took from your hands this morning."

The general, in his annoyance, had overlooked the captain's proffered hand.

Marjorie, who had not been aware of Clayborne's presence in the house, uttered a cry of surprise at the sight of him. She took the book, and as he bent over her hand with a courtly manner she said quietly, "Good-by, Mr. Clayborne. I wish you the best of fortune in life. Believe me, I do."

"Such a wish is bitter irony to me now," he replied for her ear alone. She made no answer.

General Ware with his sister and daughter entered their carriage and drove away.

Clayborne lifted his hat to them politely, and walked off to the hotel, where he hunted up Chesterfield and sat smoking with his friend until midnight.

CHAPTER XX

A VOLUME OF EMERSON

Marjorie Ware sat alone in her own room at night with a volume of Emerson in her hand. It was a little volume whose well-worn cover of plain brown cloth showed those marks of wear and tear which the books we prize the most are the most likely to receive, and which make them even dearer to us.

She allowed the book to open at random; but it was not by mere coincidence that it did so at a certain well-known essay, because between the leaves of the book at the beginning of a discourse entitled "Friendship," and following an essay on a still more interesting subject, lay a letter.

Marjorie Ware was in love with Gordon Clayborne. It is perhaps betraying a confidence in setting forth the fact thus boldly upon this particular page, for she had never told her love to him; she had never admitted it to herself; she had denied it to her father. She had come to the conclusion that Gordon Clayborne was not a man upon whom she could safely place her affections, and she had made up her mind that he must be dismissed from her thoughts. This was more

easily resolved upon than done, yet Miss Marjorie was a young woman of determination. From her father she inherited a strong will; from a long line of Puritan ancestry behind the stern old general she came naturally by an inflexible devotion to purpose. Therefore, upon beholding Gordon's well-known handwriting upon an envelope encasing an epistle doubtless full of excuses, of regrets, and expressions of unfaltering devotion such as men are prone to employ to win a desperate cause, what was more natural and logical than that she should tear the letter into a hundred pieces and cast them from her, just as she had resolved to tear the offender from her heart. Surely it would be unwise to read a document calculated at least to disturb the mind if not to weaken the resolution.

The records of affairs of sentiment, as far as the writer of this tale has been able to investigate them, fail to reveal any instance where a woman, similarly placed, has thus sternly treated an unoffending letter, and Marjorie Ware was not the one exception to the rule. She hastily broke the seal and was at once deeply absorbed in the inclosure.

My dear Little Comrade: — If I do not succeed in my attempt to see and talk to you, and I feel more than a suspicion that your father will endeavor to prevent such a meeting, this letter, if it finds its way into your hands, will tell you what I should have tried to tell you.

To begin with, you have forbidden me to call

you any longer by that familiar and friendly title which has grown dear to me through association and usage. Little comrade, — I always think of you as such, — it would be impossible for me to return so suddenly to a more formal way of addressing you; so I beseech you, pardon me if I disobey you in this one particular.

By the time these lines are before your eyes, I shall have left the city; I shall be once more in the field, with small prospect of seeing you for a long, long period, if indeed that time ever comes again. The uncertainties of this present life are so very great that when we take leave of our friends to return to the seat of war, what is more natural than that we should carry away with us the feeling that we have possibly looked upon their faces for the last time. This being the case, I want you to think the best you can of me. You told me that in the past you had great confidence in me, that you believed in me completely. I heard you say those words with a momentary joy that was turned into misery on hearing you add that you could never fully trust me again, that the element of doubt would always remain a barrier to our friendship. It will be the object of my life to dispel this doubt. I shall never rest until I have removed that barrier.

To judge me with justice, you should be able to put yourself in my place. I was in command of a transport upon which was a woman, a young woman whom I had known for many years. She

was a prisoner, and I allowed her to escape. You call her a prisoner of war — a spy, and say as such she should have been punished. Possibly; but to me she was a woman. That fact overshadowed all others. In your eyes she beguiled me into letting her go free. In reality she pleaded with me. You cannot understand what it is to be a man and have a woman plead with you for her very life and liberty. If it were possible for you to understand it, you would acquit me. Perhaps there are some men who could have remained obdurate. Gordon Clayborne is not one of those.

You asked me to assure you that at no time in the past had I entertained for her any affection. How easily could a few words have been spoken to convince you that I had not. Yet I did not speak them. Perhaps I did not deign to. It is impossible for me to understand why you should think the less of me because I may have entertained some tender regard for another, before I ever saw or heard of you. Yet the fact that you demanded such an assurance causes me some pleasure, because, in spite of yourself, it shows me that you are not entirely indifferent to me. Although, Marjorie, I may have, in the past, felt for some of your fair sex a sentiment which is akin and was perhaps mistaken for love, I know now that it was but the stirring of an affection which could not awaken until I had seen you. In them my imagination sought an ideal which could never be realized until I saw you.

"In them," you repeat. Were there then sev-

eral? you ask yourself, opening those dark blue eyes of yours. Little comrade, if there had been a dozen I should love you a dozen times as much. Had there been a hundred, my affection for you would be a hundred-fold as great.

But you have forbidden me to speak to you of love and I disobey your injunction. I can only offer as an excuse that it would be impossible to write to you at all and not testify to you the ardor, the sincerity of my affection. I had hoped to see you and plead my cause in person; but failing that, I have only recourse to this cold white paper and this halting pen to implore you to restore me at least to some small niche in the temple of your regard. If, in the future, I ever occupy any part of your thoughts, will you not think of me as a man who is unwavering in his affection for you? Although you said you could not continue to correspond with me as you have done in the past, will you not at least write a few lines in answer to this letter? And if it is impossible for you ever to accord to me the affection which I desire so very much, and had hoped for, at least do not deny me the sunlight of your friendship; for if you do deny it, I shall be forever the most miserable of men. But I shall always be,

Your devoted,

GORDON CLAYBORNE.

Marjorie Ware read the letter intently, and after sitting for some time in thought, with her blue

eyes fixed steadily before her, she turned to the book which had fallen to the floor, and endeavored to quiet her feelings by reading. Gordon's missive had been secreted in the leaves of the book between the two essays most in keeping with his thoughts. One was a discourse upon "Friendship," the other upon "Love." Marjorie's selection chanced to fall upon both of these. When she had finished and closed the book she reread his letter. It is impossible to state with any degree of accuracy how many times she read the letter subsequently, but it is certain that the following epistle, traced in the delicate feminine handwriting of the period, finally found its way to the camp-fire where sat Gordon Clayborne.

DEAR MR. CLAYBORNE: — I cannot refuse to write you a few lines in answer to such an urgent appeal as that contained in the letter which I found so unexpectedly upon taking up the volume of Emerson. If it is a matter of such vast importance to you, I will write to you sometimes, only I must beg of you not to write me such ardent protestations of affection as those contained in your recent letter. It would not be right for me to permit it, for I feel certain that I can never entertain for you any deeper feeling than that of a friend. At one time I did think that you had forfeited even that title, but upon reconsideration, I have acquitted you of any intentional double dealing with me; at the same time I feel quite

sure that your temperament and mine render us unsuited for any closer tie.

You say so earnestly that you wish for and will be satisfied with my friendship, that I cannot deny it to you; particularly as I always shall feel an interest in the welfare of one who for so long held a high place in my esteem.

Please, my dear Mr. Clayborne, consider this as final; and if it gives you pain to read it, remember it pains me to write it. But after what has occurred it is the only thing to do. So, if you do write me again, or if after the war you should see me again, please understand that I can never be more than

Your sincere friend,

MARJORIE WARE.

CHAPTER XXI

THE HOUSE AT THE CROSS-ROADS

As the months went by General Ware's health had become restored, and once more he had command of a brigade in the field. Again his impassive face was turned critically up and down the long line of troops. Again the soldiers heard his cold quiet voice issuing calm orders at the drill or on the field of battle. General Ware enforced their obedience and commanded their respect; and although neither he nor they were aware that he possessed their affection, he could have led them through a fiery furnace to the very last man.

Marjorie Ware had gone to the front as a field nurse. Her father had promised her that she should, and she held him to his word.

The opposing armies had struggled back and forth in the Wilderness, leaving a long sickening trail of blood.

With the cry of "On to Richmond!" the Army of the Potomac had fought the battles of Spottsylvania and Cold Harbor, and others no less terrible and bloody. Lee had made one last attempt to "swap queens" by threatening Washington. The country was thrown into a fever of alarm, but

Grant did not retreat. He sent support to the capital, while he continued to advance.

Slowly Lee had been driven back into Richmond, stubbornly contesting each foot of the soil; taking three men for every two he lost; planning and manœuvring with all his old-time skill; executing and fighting with all his old brilliancy and vigor. But where his army went there followed Grant, fighting wherever Lee would stand; like a giant hammer, ever pounding the same spot; persistently, relentlessly pushing forward, always toward the same end. With so many thousands falling in battle, there was ample work for Marjorie Ware to do. How was she able to do it? To nurse the wounded, to see the blood, the suffering, and the disease; to support all this willingly, cheerfully, and not be overpowered by the burden? She was delicate to look at, with soft skin and slender figure, but concealed under that delicate exterior she had a fibre of nerve which carried her through the many trials. She was one of many women who uncomplainingly and fearlessly endured privation and overwork with a courage unsurpassed by the bravest men; inspired by the same patriotism, supported by the same spirit.

It was toward the 1st of April, 1865, and Marjorie was riding her little mare Dolly along a road deep with Virginia mud. It was night and Miss Ware was alone. She had started that afternoon in the company of a cavalcade of several hundred from Petersburg, expecting long before nightfall

to be at Dinwiddie, where there was work for her to do. Miss Ware had been careless. The day had been exceptionally fine, and she had allowed her mare to linger behind while she herself enjoyed the pleasant air and sunshine, doubly sweet after a long period spent in hospital tents. Marjorie had taken the wrong road and had lost her way. She was not greatly worried, for as soon as she became aware of her error she began to retrace her route, feeling certain that her absence would soon be discovered, and that some one would be sure to come back in search of her. But meanwhile the horse was stumbling with fatigue, and the rider was wet and numb from a cold rain which had set in. This rain drove violently in her face, a pelting, blinding storm, which cut her cheek pitilessly, and made the mare droop her head and swerve in her attempt to turn from the tempest. It was so dark Marjorie could not distinguish the road save for the splashing of the horse's hoofs through the mire, and the dark wall of trees on each side of the way. She drew her little army cloak more closely around her, and wondered whether she would be obliged to spend the night thus, and whether the mare and she could hold out until assistance or morning came. "We must keep up heart a little longer, Dolly," she said, trying to revive her own courage by speaking cheerily to the horse. "They must have missed us some time ago, and may come at any moment to find us."

A light shone through the trees in front of her. It seemed to disappear, then came again to shine more steadily. "There they are now, Doll!" she exclaimed joyfully. "Did I not tell you they would soon find us?" She urged the horse forward as she spoke, and the intelligent creature pricked up its ears, and responded to her voice by increasing its speed to a canter. Marjorie gave a loud call and rode forward, forgetful for the moment of the rain and chill. The light remained stationary, and Miss Ware finally drew rein, to find herself in front of a house which stood hidden among the trees a few rods back from the road. The girl sat still in the saddle. The mare drooped her head, and cowed again before the blast. Marjorie hesitated. She was in an enemy's country. It was night, and she was alone. Her spirits sank again. Here was shelter; but was it a safe one? The storm seemed to increase in violence, swaying the trees about the house, and beating against the paintless boards worn gray by a hundred similar encounters with the elements. But here was refuge, and she decided to avail of it. The chances were in favor of her finding human beings willing to afford her shelter for the night. Her calling should be her protection if she needed any. She approached. A small outhouse caught her eye. This would offer a snug place for Dolly, she thought, and riding in, she saw that although it was untenanted there was a small quantity of dry hay and straw. With a childlike cry of joy

she dismounted. "Here is bed and board for you, my pet," she exclaimed, and like a good little soldier made the mare comfortable for the night. Then she went to the house and knocked boldly at the door. The wind and rain drowned all her efforts to rouse the inmates, for no answer came. She knocked again, louder than before, and raising her voice called shrilly for those within to open. She began to think she would have to share the horse's straw bed when the sound of a bolt being slipped back was received with welcome by her ears. The door opened a little way. Thinking only to get out of the tempest, Marjorie pushed in. A heavy gust of wind blew the door shut with a bang, at the same time extinguishing a light held in a man's hand.

With fast beating heart Marjorie heard the bolt shoved back into place, while she stood in the darkness. In the brief instant she had caught a glimpse of the figure before her, and it had sent a creeping fear through her whole body. A hand was placed on her shoulder, and she was conducted into the room where there was light. A small fire of pine knots burned merrily on a hearth, throwing fantastic shadows on the bare walls. Marjorie, with her cape over her head, disclosing only a part of her face, confronted two men. She looked at them intently, with a frightened expression in her deep blue eyes, made brighter by excitement. He who had brought her in was short and stout, with a face of Hibernian mould. His hair and beard

were red and shaggy. In some fracas he had lost an eye, and that which remained to him was red, either from drink or rage, and he was unsteady in his gait. Without speaking, he walked or rather swayed toward a chair and sat down wearily. His clothing was rough and worn, and splashed with mud. There were other splashes on his coat. They were dark red, and Marjorie saw that they were of blood. Around his neck he had tied a handkerchief, and this also was dyed red.

Marjorie looked from this unwelcome sight to the other figure. He was standing by the table with one hand resting heavily upon it. He was young and well built. His face was bronzed from long exposure, and might not have been called bad looking if his eyes had not been inflamed by passion and drink. He, like his companion, was splashed with mud from top to toe. A knife lay where it had been thrown on the floor at his feet. He did not stoop to pick it up, but pouring some liquor into a cup from a demijohn at his elbow, pushed the jug across the table toward his companion with a gesture half conciliatory, half contemptuous, saying grimly, "Here, Galloway, take a drink," and then slowly drank his own dram, looking at Marjorie as he did so. The dancing fire threw its fitful light about the room, now glowing upon the men's faces, now casting them in shadow, making them look more brutal and the scene more weird.

The taller man was the first to speak. "I know

we are drunk," he said, struggling to keep back a hiccough.

Marjorie was frightened. She saw that she was at the mercy of two drunken men. That neither of them made any attempt to harm her reassured her only for the moment. That they seemed to regard without surprise her entrance upon the scene of their orgie merely indicated how far gone were their reasoning faculties. She looked about her quickly for the best method of escape, knowing that she must keep her wits, trusting that the stupor of the men would permit her to get out of the terrifying situation.

"Yes, we 're drunk, Miss — Miss, dang it, can't remember name, but we 've cause to be. Working day and night for a week — look at us — don't we look as though we needed bracing up?" The question admitted of no denial and Marjorie made no answer.

"But did n't expect you so early, Miss — I 'll remember your name soon as I get little sober — or should n't have gotten like this; but I 'm not so bad as I look — can talk business — Jes' wait a little till I dip my head in cold water. I 'll be back shortly. It 'll take more 'n pint of whiskey to bowl over Jake Kilby when there 's business to attend to or ladies" —

Having delivered himself thus, slowly and with some difficulty, stumbling over the longer words and making the greatest effort to be coherent, Jake Kilby steadied himself against the table and

walked with surprising straightness towards the door.

Marjorie stepped quickly out of his way. What he meant by this harangue she could not understand, but both men evidently looked upon her as an expected guest. She resolved to humor this whim, hoping that before the revelers came to their senses she would get out of the house and safely upon Dolly's back. It was with a feeling of joy that she saw Kilby leave the door open and disappear into the dark passageway. Here she heard him stumble, and striking against some inanimate object swear at it roundly. Then his heavy boots sounded in a distant room, followed by the swash of water, accompanied by puffing and blowing as of a porpoise.

Marjorie gave an anxious look at the man seated in the chair. He ignored her presence completely. With a light tread the girl was out in the hall and fumbling at the huge bolt. It was rusty and refused to budge. She tried to push back the iron bar, and only succeeded in making it rattle loudly. She stopped to listen; Kilby was still occupied with his ablutions. Again she tried, with all her strength, with all the desperation of necessity and of despair. She could not get out. She halted, breathless. A feeling of her helplessness came over her. She rattled at the bolt noisily and struck the panel in anger with her clinched hand. She was obliged to remain a prisoner. Not knowing which way to turn, in her extremity she went

back into the room. The man with the bloody kerchief was talking to himself. Marjorie went up to him and said in a tone of command: —

"Come and open the door! I wish to go out."

"He struck me," muttered the man, blinking at her with his one red eye. "He struck me with a knife — my own knife, too — He turned it against me."

"Who did?" inquired Marjorie.

"Kilby did," was the reply, while he looked up at her.

She saw he had renewed his potations from the jug.

"My own knife," he went on in a maudlin tone.

Marjorie stooped quickly, caught up the weapon, and concealed it under her cloak. Then she grasped him by the shoulder and in peremptory tones said, "Rouse yourself, man, and open the door for me! I want to go out!"

"Can't see why!" he hiccoughed.

"It is not for you to see, but to obey," she said sternly.

The drunken man got upon his feet with difficulty. Overcoming her great repugnance, she assisted his tottering legs in a zigzag path to the front door. Her heart beat high between anticipation of a speedy release and fear that the man was too far gone in his cups to move the bolt.

"Quick!" she exclaimed in an excited whisper, hardly able to repress a cry of fear as she heard Kilby's footsteps approaching.

The drunkard fumbled at the bolt, muttering to himself. Before he could draw it back, a sharp knock sounded on the outside, and voices were heard in conversation. Marjorie stepped back, looked around helplessly, and made a run for the stairway. Upstairs she bounded like a frightened deer, bent only on escaping the present danger, and stood on the landing above in the darkness with beating heart, wondering what the outcome for her would be. If the newcomers were men untouched by drink, she felt that, although they were enemies, an appeal to their manhood would not be unheeded, and they would allow a woman to depart unmolested. She listened, as Kilby reached the door, pushed his companion aside so heavily as to cause him to fall, and threw back the bolt.

To her intense joy a woman's voice spoke, — a voice of refinement doubly musical to her ear.

Marjorie had her foot on the stair to descend when Kilby pronounced a name which caused her to stop short, as if she had been struck.

"You, Miss Dowd, why, I thought you were in the house!"

"Kilby, what is the matter with you? You've been drinking! Shame upon you, man! at such a time when there is work to be done! And as for that drunken creature who has fallen asleep there in the corner, he is disgraceful. I thought I could depend on you at least, Kilby."

"So you can, Miss Dowd. I am sobering up

quickly. It is n't often whiskey gets the best of me."

"What was that you said about my being in the house?"

Kilby hesitated. To repeat that he had mistaken another for her would be to show that he had been more under the influence of the liquor than his pride would let him admit. He drew his hand across his forehead and looked about him. The first woman had disappeared. "I have been pretty far gone, Miss, but I am all right now and ready for business. I must have dreamed it."

Flora Dowd paid no further attention to the subject, attributing it to the fantastic whim of an inebriate's brain.

"Lock the outer door and come into the room here!" Then, in the next breath, she cried, "Lord, what a disorderly place! Put a few more sticks on the fire! Cannot you bring a lamp? We must have more light. I expect Major Clayborne to meet me here."

There was no mistaking the words. Marjorie heard them plainly, *Major Clayborne*. He had written her recently of his promotion. Although she had not seen him during the past year, he had through his letter slowly reëstablished himself in her esteem. Down in her heart she still had cherished the belief that he was worthy of much regard. Now her last atom of trust was shattered with a sudden blow. How could it be possible that a man could be so false, not to her alone, but to every

trust! Yet she heard the words spoken plainly, so carelessly and naturally, — "Major Clayborne to meet me here." Marjorie thought no longer of escape; she only thought of learning more, of obtaining possession of the truth, of solving the whole mystery at whatever cost, at whatever risk to herself. She entered the room above that which was occupied below. The house was unfurnished. The upper rooms were unused and untenanted, save by rats which skurried about, squeaking. She sat down, thinking only of one thing. The ceiling of the room below was unplastered, and the sound of voices came to her through the floor upon which she sat, but beyond an occasional word she could distinguish nothing but the murmur. A slight ray of light came up through a crack in the boards. She took the knife which she still had in her hand, and stealthily, with the greatest pains, cut the crack a little larger, until by putting her eye close to it she could make out a little of the scene below. Quietly as a mouse at its nocturnal work, she plied the knife, gradually making the aperture larger and larger, carefully brushing each shaving to one side. She was at work directly over the table, and could now see a young and handsome woman sitting nonchalantly on the edge of it, with one foot on the floor, while a glimpse of a portion of Kilby's large figure was visible, seated in a chair on the other side. A few tiny slivers of wood dropped full upon the table.

"What was that?" exclaimed Flora Dowd, looking up.

Marjorie's blood seemed to stop flowing, the knife remained poised in air.

"It must be the rats," answered Kilby indifferently. "The old place is full of them."

The conversation below was resumed.

Marjorie waited, hardly breathing for several minutes, then the mouse began its work again. When she had made the hole as large as she dared, she lay extended on the floor, and placing her eye to the aperture could see a part of the room and both of the occupants. With her ear to the crevice she could hear all that was said. A fierce thrill of excitement went through her. She forgot her past fears. If there was a double game to be played in love and war she could play her part.

By the use of an abundance of cold water, Kilby had succeeded in throwing off the effects of the liquor. He was a man who could consume a large quantity of whiskey, but he rarely allowed it to overpower him when there was work to be done. He entertained a marked respect for Regina Bowie, known to him as Flora Dowd, and felt ashamed — not so much that she had seen him indulging in a debauch, as that she should find him remiss in his duty. The hazy recollection of another woman who had appeared so mysteriously out of the night and whom he had mistaken for Miss Dowd still troubled him. What had become of her puzzled him. He concluded that in the confusion incident to the arrival of Flora the other woman had slipped out into the darkness as mysteriously as she had come in.

Regina Bowie had drawn a chair up to the table and was busy reading a letter. She was wet from the rain and mud bespattered, but indifferent to these discomforts she was absorbed in the business of the moment. Marjorie studied her with the deepest interest, examining every detail of her face. The arched eyebrow, the delicate nose, the resolute mouth, a little large, but a captivating mouth with warm red lips which, when parted in a smile, revealed white, even teeth. That she was handsome Marjorie could not deny, although she saw in her the woman who was responsible for Gordon Clayborne's perfidy.

Marjorie once had held him as a hero, she had placed him upon a pedestal and worshiped him from afar. She had seen the idol descend from its column and become nothing more than a man. As time wore on she had begun to rehabilitate the idol and replace it upon its pedestal, and now a stroke of lightning had laid it low in the dust at her feet, shattered into a thousand fragments. She was outraged, wrathful. She felt that she could punish the apostate with unrelenting sternness.

If it had not been for these passions which upheld her she would have been broken-hearted.

The storm had lulled. Only a fitful wailing of the dying wind sounded through the tall pines. The heavy thud of horses' hoofs announced the approach of some riders.

Alert on the instant, Regina looked up. "That must be Clayborne," she said.

The woman listening in the room above drew a quick breath ; the word had cut her sharply.

" Does he know where to put up the horses ? " Regina inquired.

" I 'll go and show him," and Kilby went out of the front door, leaving it open after him.

The night air blew in with a chill. Regina poured out some whiskey and drank it off easily. Then she drew up to the fire and waited. Kilby met the newcomers in the road, and led them to a spot some little distance back in the woods, where for greater safety all the horses were kept.

Now was the moment for Marjorie Ware to leave the house. Here was an opportunity to slip out to the shed where she had left Dolly, and after the men had entered the house to ride off in safety. The thought of flight never entered her head. She tiptoed to the window with all the precaution of a thief and looked out into the night. She could discern little beyond the swaying pine-trees near the house and the dark sky above. The tramp of boots and the jingle of spurs on the porch brought her back to her peep-hole. Two young men in Confederate gray entered the room with Kilby. Marjorie's heart was beating so fast and loud as to pain her, but her lips were set with determination. She was resolved to meet guile with guile.

If Major Gordon Clayborne had come to betray the secrets of the Union side, a retribution was in store for him. Marjorie would hear everything

that was said, and if she ever escaped she would not spare him.

One of the officers lay down by the fire in silence with an air of dejection and fatigue; the other in the centre of the room stood buoyantly as if no weather or reverse of fortune could dampen his spirits. Although his back was turned to her, Marjorie thought she recognized his figure before he spoke. How she loathed him in his gray coat!

"Gad, Regina, what a night we've had. I mean Major." He corrected himself with a laugh. "I always forget your title."

Clayborne's voice!

How vividly Marjorie recalled when she had last heard it! How he had pleaded with her to believe in him and trust him! How nearly he had persuaded her! She shuddered now to think how near, and thanked God that she had not granted him the last begged-for interview in Washington. She recalled the letters he had since written to her, full of sentiment and affection, notwithstanding her strong edict that love should be proscribed. She knew that she could never believe in any man again as long as she lived — except her father.

She noticed that there was a lighter quality to Clayborne's voice. The same soft intonations were there, but he spoke more airily, and with a little more vivacity. But was he not speaking to the woman he loved, and could he not change his mood as easily as he could his coat?

"Well, Major, what is your budget of news?"

continued Clayborne. He changed his position as he spoke, the light from the fire fell across his face, and nothing but the greatest self-control prevented Marjorie from crying out aloud. It was not Gordon Clayborne! The same dark, curly hair, the same fine forehead, but not Gordon.

CHAPTER XXII

MARJORIE WARE AND REGINA BOWIE

"My news is not of the brightest, Clifford," said Regina, taking a chair by the fire.

"Let us have it. No one in the service has brought more accurate news."

"Sheridan is at Dinwiddie," continued the young woman.

"I know it," nodded Major Clifford Clayborne. "The little cuss is tearing up the railroads and destroying our communications with his usual activity."

"Do you know how many men he has with him?" inquired Regina.

"The rascal generally rides on his raids at the head of five or ten thousand of his robbers," replied Clifford.

"He has nine thousand mounted men," exclaimed Regina. "Here is a copy of a letter from him to one of his division commanders. Warren has been ordered to support him. You see Sheridan is not merely on a raid. It is to be a general advance all along the line."

"Well, let them advance," said Clifford doggedly. "They can have Richmond if they want

to, but they can't have Lee. They can't have the Army of Northern Virginia."

"Clifford, you do not mean that Richmond will surrender!" cried Regina.

"It will, my dear," answered the Confederate major gloomily. "Lee cannot hold Richmond another week. Before three days are over they must all be out of the city. There is no use closing our eyes to the inevitable."

"Clifford," cried Regina, "what you tell me breaks my heart!" There was a note of pain in her voice, and she walked up and down the room with the nervous tread of a caged panther. The heart in the bosom of the other woman, listening with breathless interest in the room above, was correspondingly elated.

"I cannot believe it," moaned Regina. "I will not believe it!" she added fiercely, stamping her foot on the floor. "I will take a musket and stand on the ramparts myself before I will see the city given over to the hands of those vandals!"

"Our men have fought like heroes," said Clifford quietly.

"I know they have," acquiesced Regina, "but they must hold out. What will the country say when it hears that all is lost?"

"All is not lost," cried Clifford, springing to his feet. "They can have Richmond. They will find it but an empty shell, a husk for which they have spent their treasure and wasted rivers of blood. They will find the real Southern Confeder-

acy in the hearts of Lee and his soldiers. There the fire of patriotism will continue to burn. They cannot quench that, Regina."

"I will never submit to these invaders of our soil. If they cannot subdue our women, then how can they expect to subdue our men?" cried Regina.

"You are well worthy of your shoulder-straps, Major," exclaimed Clifford, changing his mood to one of gayety. "The reports which you have brought to me are of inestimable value. I shall take them to Richmond at once. Anything of value or interest which comes in your way send or bring to me there."

"Trust me, Clifford, to let nothing escape me which will be of value to our side. I'll go out again. Good-by, till we meet again, my boy."

"All right, Regina," replied Clifford. "But first I must get something to eat, for I am ravenous. Then I'll ride back at once. Come, Kilby, have you anything in the larder?"

"Nothing but chicken and hoecake, plenty of that," answered Kilby.

"Chicken and hoecake," repeated Clifford. "You scouts feast like Olympian gods. I only wish the poor fellows in the trenches at Richmond could get a bite of such fare. But as they can't, Kilby, set forth the provender and I'll do double justice to it. There's work to be done, and we must stoke up the furnace fires of the old machine, so that she will run full blast," and Clifford, cross-

ing over to where the officer lay sleeping on his blanket by the fire, shook him by the arm.

The man roused himself wearily, rose to a sitting posture, and murmured something in a low voice. From her position Marjorie could not see him; she could only hear the clear voice of Major Clifford Clayborne.

"Nonsense, man, eat something. The reason you have no strength is because you don't take enough food when chance brings it in your way. As for me, I'm going to fill my belly for present needs, and my saddle-bags for the future. After that, let hunger find me if she will, for I'm damned if I know where the supplies will come from."

The other kicked aside the blanket and rose to his feet.

"That's right, old fellow," cried Clifford. "Take a nip of whiskey to give you an appetite, and then take a chicken leg in your fingers, for we must get away at once."

Regina, who had been tightening her belt, and preparing herself for further scout duty, poured out three generous drams. "Come, Frank," she said gayly, "brace up and be a man. Take a drink to the success of the only cause worthy of a man's courage."

"I'll drink to you, Regina," cried the young man, taking the cup fiercely. "I'll drink to your eyes — your lips — your soul — everything about you — you, for whom I have given up friends, honor, country, everything the world holds dear."

"Come, Frank, old fellow, don't be sentimental now. There 's other and more important work in hand."

"But I can only think of you. I only live for a word from you. It was I who really let you escape from the River Queen, not Gordon Clayborne. I could have held you prisoner, but I did not. You have held me a prisoner ever since. Either let me go or give me a little portion of that hire for which I sold myself, your heart."

Regina laughed her low, musical laugh. "I will not let you go. I could never spare you, Frank, and you are always in my heart, you silly fellow. Come, let that suffice you."

"Am I, Regina, am I really of some value in your eyes?" cried the young man, his wan face lighting up. "Then I will do anything in the world for you. I will go now to the horses and have them all ready. Bring me a bit of food if you wish, Clayborne," and he hurriedly left the room.

Regina shrugged her shoulders and looked at Clifford. "Frank 's a good fellow," she said lightly, "but we must hurry now and not lose any more time."

Clifford, who took his love affairs lightly, did not give a passing thought to what was tragedy in the life of another man.

"Lead on, Regina; let us see what Kilby has prepared," and whistling merrily, Major Clifford Clayborne followed her from the room.

With swimming head, and heart beating to suffocation, Marjorie Ware had seen the brother whom she had thought dead standing below among her enemies, the enemies of his country. He was pale and thin; worn to a shadow of the boy she had mourned as dead, but he moved and talked in the land of the living. What he said seemed at first almost meaningless to her. She could not believe in her own senses but lay half stunned upon the floor. Slowly the full significance penetrated to her bewildered mind, and by an effort of her will she roused herself to thought and action.

The three Confederates were eating in the kitchen. She could hear the low murmur of their conversation, and occasionally an outburst in the fresh voice of Clifford Clayborne. Her brother had just left the house. He was somewhere near at hand. He was not a rebel, not an enemy, but her brother. She must find him. He would be her protector. She would win him back from the woman who was destroying him. A certain fierce spirit which she never knew she possessed roused itself within her. She felt herself the match for this other woman.

Summoning all her wits, she rose cautiously to her feet. She steadied herself for an instant, took up the knife, put it in her belt, and crept stealthily towards the door. Down the stairs she went step by step. The front door was half open; the gray light of approaching dawn showed her the way. Once outside that door and she would

be free, — free, with the secret of Lee's scouts in her possession, — free to find her brother, and ride off with him to the Union lines, for he must come with her, she was determined. Silently she came down, her eyes fixed intently on the streak of light which fell athwart the floor. She longed to spring down the staircase at a bound, fling open the door, and rush off into the wood. Such a course would give an instant alarm and insure capture. She must have Frank, then ride away on Dolly's back. The game must be played out carefully to the end.

Kilby, no longer drunk, but sober and alert, had heard a rustling noise overhead, followed by a light step on the stairs. He stole quickly out into the hallway, and as Marjorie's foot touched the last stair his arm wound about her waist, and she was held a prisoner, with the brown face of Kilby looking down into hers. If she could have driven the knife deep into him and flown out of the door, she would have done so; but holding her without effort with one hand, he disarmed her with the other. She tried to struggle, but it was fruitless. She was her captor's superior in brains, in spirit, in courage even, for he might have yielded under conditions where she had fought on. In everything but brute force did she surpass him, but brute force held the day without effort. With a smile upon his face, Kilby drew her back into the room.

"You don't look much like Miss Boyd now. I must have been pretty drunk," he said grimly.

"And so you have been in the house all the time," he added.

During these terrible moments she had not spoken. Kilby had taken her so unawares, so suddenly had her hopes of flight been dispelled, that she could only struggle in desperation to obtain the liberty which had been so nearly won. Now she looked up into his face, and putting into her voice all the pleading she could muster, she said: "I want to find my brother. I implore you, if ever you had a sister — let me go. I beseech you, in the name of any woman whom you hold in affection, do not keep me from him."

Kilby released his hold, but as she darted toward the door his big form blocked the way.

"Not so fast," he said quietly. "Who is your brother?"

"Francis Ware," panted Marjorie. "He who just left the house a few moments ago. Quick! let me follow him, or it will be too late!"

Kilby shook his head. "I can't until I know more about you. You have been hiding in the house, perhaps spying. Have you been listening at keyholes?"

"I came in here only to find shelter from the storm. I swear solemnly I will never reveal a word I may have heard."

"Then you have heard something?"

"I will never open my mouth, I swear to you."

Kilby shook his head. "I would n't trust a woman on that score," he replied.

Clifford Clayborne's voice was heard in the hall.

"Now, Regina, we must be off. Remember where to send to me. May success attend you," and Major Clayborne was about to depart when, looking into the room, he stopped in surprise.

"What have we here — a petticoat!" he exclaimed, entering the room. "By Jove, what have you been hiding, Kilby? And such a pretty one, too. What's the matter, my dear? Has Kilby been treating you unkindly?"

"Oh, sir, as you are a gentleman, let me go from here, I beg of you!"

She tried to dart past Kilby, but he laid a restraining arm about her.

"Hands off, Kilby," cried Clifford gayly, "don't you see the lady wants to come to me?"

"I wish to leave the house," repeated Marjorie. "I implore you, sir, who have the manners of a gentleman, to permit me to go in peace."

At a peremptory gesture from Clifford Clayborne, Kilby released Marjorie. "Let me persuade you to stay, my love," said Clifford, gallantly coming forward. "I do not know where you have come from, but I cannot take leave of such a pretty young creature so coldly."

"Clifford," cried Regina, who had followed him into the room and stood behind him impatiently, "what can you be thinking of to waste precious moments like the present at such nonsense! Kilby,

how did this young woman get into the house? What does she want here?"

"I think she has been hiding here some time," replied Kilby. "I am afraid she has been spying on us."

"Then lock her up where she can do no harm. We will look into her case later. There is no time now, as we all must be about our duty."

Kilby started to obey the command. "I 'll keep her safe in one of the rooms under lock and key," he said quietly.

"I promise faithfully to repeat no word that I have heard," cried Marjorie, "if you will only let me go." She looked at Clifford as she spoke.

"She shall go," cried Clifford suddenly. "We will not keep the little girl here. She can do no harm. Let her out, Kilby."

"Clifford Clayborne!" cried Regina Bowie, "this is folly on your part. She may do great harm. She may have overheard all that we have said. We cannot afford to take the risk. Kilby, do as I command!"

Clifford sprang forward, his eyes flashing, his handsome face all aglow.

"Put your hand on that girl and I 'll brain you, Kilby!" he cried.

"Clifford, are you mad?" remonstrated Regina, turning from red to white with anger. "Don't you see the risk?"

"She is a woman," replied Clifford, "and she has asked my protection. No Clayborne has ever

refused that to a woman. Let her go from here, Kilby!"

His voice, manner, and every gesture were so like his elder brother's that Marjorie seemed to see Gordon there before her saying: —

"She was a woman and I could not hold her a prisoner."

There was silence for a moment. Then Regina took up the word. "Would you injure our cause, Clifford, in the hour of great peril, for a woman? — for a woman, too, about whom you know nothing? That is carrying foolish sentiment too far. In the name of your duty, I implore you to allow us at least to keep this girl here a few hours."

Clifford hesitated; then turning to Kilby, said abruptly: —

"You may stay here and keep this young lady one hour — not a moment longer. Then let her go where she wills. That cannot hurt her. Treat her with every respect! If you do not, you shall answer to me, and the reckoning will be a rough one, I assure you. Now I must be off. Remember, Kilby, what I say to you. Good-by, Regina," and turning, he hurriedly left the room.

Almost to the very door of the house, Francis Ware had brought up the horses. Clifford sprang lightly into the saddle and plunged the spurs into his horse. "We must make up for lost time, Ware," he called out blithely as they galloped rapidly away.

At his departure Marjorie felt as if she would

sink to the floor, but at the sight of the other woman standing before her she drew herself up, and a look of anger shone in her eyes.

"Who are you, where did you come from, and what do you here?" asked Regina Bowie coldly.

"I am a nurse in the Union army. My name is Marjorie Ware. I am a sister of Francis Ware, whom I thought dead," she answered bitterly.

Regina Bowie started with surprise. Before she could speak, Marjorie went on: "And you are Flora Dowd, or Regina somebody. You have taken my brother from me, and it was you who, when a prisoner, induced Major Gordon Clayborne to let you escape."

"Yes, I am Flora Dowd," replied Regina coolly. "Now you see me, what do you think of me?"

"I hate you," replied Marjorie vehemently. "I hate you as I never thought to hate a human being."

Regina laughed. "You are Gordon Clayborne's sweetheart, I suppose. I thought he must have some such lodestone in the North. Well, you have captured him and I have taken your brother. Honors are even between us, are they not, pretty Mistress Marjorie?"

"No, not yet. Not till I get Frank back again," answered Marjorie firmly.

Regina's only reply was a glance of cool defiance.

"Do you love him?" cried Marjorie.

"Whom? Gordon?"

"No. My brother, Francis Ware. I know you

cannot love Gordon Clayborne or you would never have injured him."

"Oh, Gordon and I were fond of each other once," replied Regina with irritating indifference.

"I do not believe that," answered Marjorie. "I know he does not care for you."

"Oh, men are all alike. You 'll find that out before you are much older. You have already learned to play upon them somewhat. How easily you won Major Clifford Clayborne over. I quite admired you."

The words were spoken smilingly, but there was a caustic ring in the voice which rankled in Marjorie's breast.

"Do not endow me with the artifices which are yours by nature and which you use to such perfection," she replied.

The young women glared at each other. They were a few yards apart. Regina Bowie leaned carelessly against the table, flecking her riding-boots with a whip; perfectly cool, always smiling, but with a glitter in her wondrous dark eyes which boded nothing good to her opponent. Kilby had retired to a corner. He looked at Marjorie, who stood as straight and tall as she could, her mouth firmly set, her bosom heaving with the emotions she endeavored to control. He noted Regina's handsome and more dominant figure, and continued to watch them both with deep interest.

When Marjorie spoke again, it was with a coolness which equaled that of her formidable rival.

"You do not love my brother. You do not love any one, because you cannot."

Regina winced. "I may love him for all you can tell," she answered. "He is a right good fellow."

"You cannot love him," Marjorie laughed bitterly, "or you would not kill him as you are doing. If you did care for him you would send him back to those whom he has deserted."

"I will never do that," replied Regina hotly. "I want him near me."

"I did not expect that you would give him up," and again Marjorie laughed in the same bitter tone which irritated the other woman. "And yet you could drive him from you if you chose. You could show him that side of you which would break the spell. With that same consummate art which you use to enslave him, you could send him from you, back to me."

Regina's face was drawn with passion as she burst forth: "How do you know what I could do?"

"Because I can read you," was the quiet answer. "I can see through your art as if it were an open network."

"Then you can read that I will not do it," said Regina, recovering her composure.

"Will nothing induce you?"

"Nothing. I have no further time to waste with you."

"Listen for one moment," cried Marjorie has-

tily, as Regina Bowie turned away with a shrug. "The time may soon come when you will need assistance. The time may be fast approaching when I could befriend you. If you will only do this for me, if you will only send my brother from you and give him back to me, I will promise to be your friend always. That may mean much more to you than you think at this moment."

The other woman faced quickly about with a fierce light playing in her eyes. "I do not want your friendship, and I do not fear your enmity. You thought you could play the spy here. I will teach you a lesson you will not soon forget. I will prevent your doing us any harm. You shall be kept a prisoner. You shall be locked in this house and Kilby's men shall be your custodians."

There was a look of hatred in the woman's eyes. There was a ring in her voice which told that she was in earnest. Marjorie could not answer. She could not find a word to ask for clemency. She sank overpowered into a chair. Regina turned from her and spoke to Kilby, giving a few brief commands. Then she walked out of the house without giving another look in the direction of her fallen foe.

Marjorie raised her face imploringly towards Kilby. "You remember the orders of Major Clifford Clayborne — you will obey them will you not?" she faltered.

"I reckon I 'd best obey Miss Dowd's orders," he answered doggedly.

With a cry Marjorie covered her face with her hands, and remained silent.

Kilby went to the door. "You shall be well cared for, miss," he said clumsily. Then the key turned in the lock and she was left alone.

CHAPTER XXIII

RICHMOND

Clifford Clayborne and Francis Ware, having ridden in silence for some distance, halted. The major gave an order to the younger man and the pair separated, leaving Clifford Clayborne to ride alone towards Richmond. He had been in the saddle all the day before; he had not taken one minute's rest that night; with the exception of the hastily swallowed meal at the house in the woods, he had not tasted food for twenty-four hours, but he knew there was work ahead, and in the early gray of the morning he pressed on towards the city.

While Lee's army was defending Richmond, the Clayborne troopers had been doing scout duty in the surrounding country. Colonel Joseph Clayborne, rather than give up his command, had refused promotion. "I can handle a regiment of horse," he said, "but damme if I care to undertake more. Drive at the enemy whenever he comes in sight; raid him; harass him; break his lines of communication; carry off his supplies; play the very old Nick with him generally, — that is all I understand of warfare. I leave the plan-

ning of campaigns and the grand tactics to other heads. I 've ridden with these boys through the war. I 've eaten with 'em and I 've starved with 'em, I 've marched with 'em and I 've slept by 'em, I 've drilled 'em and I 've sworn at 'em, and damn 'em if God spares my life we 'll fight it out together to the end;" and so they did fight it out to the end — those whose lives were spared; but the ranks were thin, and the regiment had faded to a skeleton of its former grandeur long before the end was reached.

Through the darkest days none carried a stouter or lighter heart than Clifford Clayborne. Through storm or sun, through wet or cold or heat, through camp or battle, victory or defeat, that heart never failed. Never once doubting the justice of his cause, never once doubting the wisdom and power of his leader, he pushed on unhesitatingly towards the final goal, which to him meant ultimate triumph. And if at any time the thought of possible defeat crept for a moment into his brain, he knew but one alternative, — to "die game." Therefore with the last ditch in sight to all whose eyes were clear, Clifford Clayborne, on this Sunday morning, the second day of April, rode cheerfully back towards Richmond. He knew the town must soon be evacuated, but to him this did not mean surrender. To him the civil government of the Confederacy had long since passed into nothingness. For him the seat of government, the source of power, was in the Army of Northern Virginia — the army which had

so often carried the banners of the South to victory, that had unflinchingly faced disaster, that had been forced back by overwhelming numbers, but which, like some old bear besieged by hunters, had retired without flight, striking down those who came too near in the pursuit, with spirit yet untamed and courage undismayed. As he rode Clifford Clayborne sang blithely a fragment from one of his favorite poems: —

"Ours is no sapling, chance-sown by the fountain,
Blooming at Beltane, in winter to fade;
When the whirlwind has stripped every leaf on the mountain,
The more shall Clan-Alpine exult in her shade.
Moored in the rifted rock,
Proof to the tempest's shock,
Firmer he roots him the ruder it blow;
Menteith and Breadalbane, then,
Echo his praise again,
Roderigh Vich Alpine dhu, ho! ieroe!"

"Firmer he roots him the ruder it blow," cried Clifford. "We will take our stand by his side as long as we have strength to lift a sword. We will echo his praise as long as we have breath to sound a note."

Was ever a lost cause more nobly fought! Was ever a lost cause more valiantly lost! Were ever courage, honor, and treasure more lavishly poured forth than by these brave, unyielding cavaliers who took their stand upon a hopeless ground, and stubbornly fought there to the end!

Clifford whistled and sang as he rode along; he could no more repress his spirit than he could

keep from breathing, yet he kept a sharp eye on each side and in front. Mounted on his fleet horse he had no need to fear anything behind. The country was full of Northern scouts. Dressed in Confederate gray, they were actively keeping the Union chieftains well informed as to the movements of their enemies. Clifford Clayborne, alert, well mounted, and confident in his knowledge of the surrounding country, feared them not.

All day Clifford rode, stopping in the woods to rest for a spare hour at noon, and to gnaw a chicken bone which he had stored away in his saddle-bag. It was towards a late hour in the afternoon when horse and rider, travel-stained and weary, heard a startling noise coming towards them. Both pricked up their ears and listened.

Clifford ceased his whistling and sprang from his horse, keen as a young Indian. The sound of men approaching in force had reached his ears. With the bridle over his arm he knelt in the road, his ear to the ground. He raised his head with a puzzled expression. It was not the measured tread of marching columns, but the irregular tramp of many feet; it was the rattle of wheels, but not the heavy rumble of artillery wagons; it was the clatter of hoofs, but not the swing of a cavalry regiment. Clifford Clayborne vaulted into the saddle and galloped into the woods for a few hundred yards, where he dismounted and waited.

Down the road came a man on horseback. Vehicles of every sort followed in his wake, — ex-

press carts and farm wagons, barouches and light carriages filled with women and children; household goods and chattels; all the assets that they had been able to scrape together, all the little patrimony they could save. Richmond had fallen and this was the rout. Clifford leaped again to his saddle and soon reached the man on horseback. He was an aged negro. He bestrode a raw boned steed which even the conscription had overlooked. A handsome roll of Brussels carpet served him for a saddle, while his bridle was a piece of rope. Behind him, drawn by a pair of poor spavined beasts, wheeled a fine carriage holding a woman and two children, while piled deep about them were the few effects that had been hastily gathered together by a faithful though indiscriminating hand. A handsome mirror and a feather bed, a coal scuttle and an expensive French clock, a little clothing and some family silver — amid these relics of past grandeur sat a pale-faced woman, young and beautiful, surveying the scene with stern features and dry eyes. Her husband had fallen early in the war, one brother was in the hospital, another was with Lee. She had given her heart's nearest and dearest, and seen them swept away. She had given her money for the cause. She had taken the carpets from her floors and made them into coats for the soldiers. She had denied herself the necessities of life that those who fought might have a little more; and now with a handful of her belongings, with two small

children, she still faced the world with unconquered spirit.

"Where are you going, uncle?" inquired Clifford, drawing his blooded horse up beside the broken-down nag of the old negro. He spoke gayly, but even his light heart felt a pang at the sight before him.

"Siftin' souf, sar, siftin' souf. I 'se got my folks to tote souf. Marse lef' his family in ma care, an' I 'se totin' 'em souf for safety."

Clifford Clayborne rode up to the carriage, and for a moment leaned over the side. The woman was known to him. Many a time in better days had she, as a young girl, danced with him, laughed with him, and listened to his amusing conversation. Now he spoke seriously, but with the same cheerful ring to his voice. They were only a few words of encouragement, but they came from a heart which no disaster could subdue. The lady looked up into his face and smiled. Clayborne raised his hat gracefully and drew away, passing along the line of fugitives who were "siftin' souf." There were few good horses among them and fewer men. Every horse and man the South could spare were doing service in the war. Clifford shut his teeth together firmly and rode on towards Richmond.

A thick column of smoke rolled up before him as he went through the city streets. On each side burned warehouses, stores, and residences. Crowds of people filled the streets, wild-eyed with excitement, a struggling, pushing mass of humanity.

Among them all Clifford did not see one face he knew.

"Are the Yankees in the city?" shouted Clifford to a young man who appeared cooler headed than others around him.

"Not yet, but they will be in another twelve hours," was the answer.

"Then who set fire to all this?" asked Clayborne, pointing to a tobacco warehouse on his left which sent up dense volumes of thick, stifling smoke.

"That was done by General Ewell's order. President Davis and his cabinet have gone, and we are under martial law. The order is to leave nothing for the damned Yankees to lay their hands on."

Clifford smiled at the load of goods the youth was carrying on his shoulders.

"Have n't you got more clothes than you can comfortably wear?" he asked jocosely.

"Not more 'n I can carry, anyway; go in and help yourself," he replied, jerking his thumb over his shoulder at a store which was being looted. "Everything is free now," and he darted up a side street.

Clifford rode up the main thoroughfare. Dire confusion reigned supreme. A howling, uncontrolled mob filled every square. Barrels of whiskey, rolled out into the gutter, were broached there and their contents drunk as it ran. Along the riverfront the sky was lurid with exploding gunboats,

while bells pealing in disunion added their discord to the pandemonium of noise.

Clifford Clayborne reached the War Department. The building was almost deserted, but in one of the rooms he found the honorable secretary of war, tipping back in a chair, his mustache dipped into a glass of whiskey.

"Hello, Clayborne," was the greeting. "You 've just about time to take a nip and be off if you don't want the Yanks to get you."

Clifford saluted hurriedly. "Can I have pen and paper for a few minutes, Mr. Breckinridge?" he asked.

Breckinridge nodded towards a desk. "Help yourself, my boy. I don't think we 'll use much more of it here. The Yanks are welcome to our official paper."

"May I ask when President Davis left the city, Mr. Breckinridge?" inquired Clifford Clayborne, writing steadily.

"This morning, during church," was the reply. "The cabinet has adjourned to Danville," Breckinridge laughed gruffly. "I 'm going to join them there. I stayed here and tried to prevent Ewell from burning up everything, but he 's been raising more hell than all the Yankee shells;" and the secretary of war of the Southern Confederacy grimly drank his whiskey. Clifford handed a paper yet wet from his pen to the war secretary.

"There 's a report, Secretary Breckinridge, of an interview with one of our best scouts. It con-

tains some information of moment and will be of interest to the President. I shall take one copy of it to General Lee."

Breckinridge stuffed the paper into his pocket in silence.

"And now as there is nothing more for me to do here I may as well be off," exclaimed Clifford, rising up as abruptly as he had come in. "Good-day to you, Mr. Secretary. Have you any message to send to General Lee?" he added, pausing on the threshold.

The secretary of war stopped with a plug of tobacco in his hand on the way to his mouth. "Damn me, Clayborne, if I have anything to say. If there is anything to be done I am sure Lee will do it; as for me, like Othello, my occupation is no more," and Clifford Clayborne left the war secretary chewing the cud of bitter reflection.

"The Yankees will be in possession of the city within twelve hours, perhaps before," mused Clifford to himself. "My horse is beaten out and I am half dead. I 'll stable the poor beast and take a few hours' sleep myself. Come what may, I 'll be fresher to meet it." Speaking thus he went quietly off to the Clayborne homestead.

The stables which had once contained long rows of horses were empty and desolate. Clifford turned his charger into one of the box-stalls, and scraping together a little grain, fed and watered the handsome brute. "You 've got your work cut out for you, my beauty," said Clifford, putting his

hand affectionately on the animal's neck, "and you shall have the best there is as long as it holds out."

As if in answer the horse poked his soft nose under the master's arm. Clifford stroked it. "I know you will, Dixie; you 'll do your best with us all."

Clifford's spurs clanked loudly through the halls of the family mansion. He had been home a number of times since the beginning of the war, and each time found the house awaiting him just as he had left it. No one in Richmond would have put a hand upon any of Colonel Joseph Clayborne's belongings. Clifford looked about him at each familiar piece of furniture. "In another twenty-four hours there won't be a stick of this which we can call ours," he muttered; and throwing himself down upon the bed in his own room he fell into a deep sleep.

It was nearly morning when he awoke. The faint tinge of red was appearing in the eastern sky. Clifford opened his eyes and watched it sleepily. He felt that he could slumber on indefinitely; then rousing himself with an effort, he sprang from the bed, and plunging his face into cool water was refreshed and wide awake on the instant. There was not a morsel of food in the house, but he still had a bit of bread in his saddle-bag. This he ate hastily, in cheerful ignorance as to whence the next meal was to come. Why should he worry about food and sleep? Perhaps before the day was

over he would be lying with many others, beyond the need of human nourishment and rest. Nevertheless, he carefully stuffed into his saddle-bag what grain he could for his beast.

Time pressed unless he wished to spend the remainder of the days of war as a prisoner; and although Clifford Clayborne had no intention of doing this, he again went into the house. Returning with a box full of the family silver, he buried it in the orchard under a budding fruit-tree. "Better a little than nothing out of a wreck," he said to himself as he filled in the dirt, "and a little may mean a good deal in the days to come." Marking the spot with his eye, he sprang into the saddle and was away and out of the city to rejoin Lee's army.

With the dawn of day forty United States troopers galloped in and took possession of a city which had defied an army. Grant did not stop to examine the empty shell, but pressed after the Army of Northern Virginia. The great hunt was still on, and the quarry slipping away.

Leaving the south road, Clifford Clayborne struck out to the west. Both horse and man were as fresh as the spring morning. Clifford knew that the surrounding country was full of Federal troopers; at any moment a detachment of Sheridan's men might come riding along the road. But he knew every inch of the ground. He was familiar with every highway and byway for miles around. He had small fear of capture. He left

the main road and took a lane through the woods. It was little traveled and was overgrown with grass and weeds. He allowed his horse to drop into a walk, catching here and there a mouthful of the tender branches of young trees on either side of the lane. Clifford, himself drawing in deep draughts of the fragrant air, gave a rapid mental survey of his plans. He had in his possession information which could only be of value if delivered immediately into the hands of the commander-in-chief. He regretted the delay occasioned by his return to Richmond; he begrudged the hours spent in sleep. They had been imperative, however, for both himself and Dixie. Without rest they would have been powerless. Now they were better able to cope with the difficulties before them. A few hours more in the saddle and his present charge would be performed. Then for further duties. No exertion would be too great, no danger would appall him.

"Halt!" cried a sharp voice.

From behind the trees on his right stepped three men dressed in Federal blue, their muskets covering Clifford Clayborne's breast. Quick as a flash Clifford rose in the saddle.

"Throw down your arms and surrender!" he cried with authority.

His audacity caused them to hesitate. The young Southerner wheeled his horse, and with one dash of the spurs sent him flying off into the woods. A sharp volley followed him, the bullets singing about his ears and pattering through the

leaves. Clifford waved his hat tantalizingly and disappeared through the trees, Dixie running like a deer when it hears the baying of the hounds.

"We must not be caught napping again, old boy," exclaimed Clifford, when once out of range. "It would be a damned shame to escape being killed in battle and then to be shot like a rat in a trap."

With renewed caution Clifford continued on his way. He avoided all roads and beaten tracks, and like an Indian on the trail made his way warily through the woods. More than once, peering through the trees to the highway, he saw long lines of marching blue. More than once he heard the clatter of hoofs with the jingle of sabre and spur. A general of brigade passed so near that Clifford could have dropped him with a shot from his revolver. It was a tempting, shining mark; but although scouring the woods like an Indian, Clayborne did not fight like one. The general officer passed safely by. Clifford waited until the entire brigade had marched on, then slipping across the road, he and Dixie cut merrily through the woods, and soon, passing the enemy, preceded them by many a mile. Thus he rejoined Lee's army in safety, delivered his papers, embraced his father, and supping on a biscuit and a few handfuls of parched corn, was soon sleeping peacefully on the ground among his own battle-worn troopers, with as clear a conscience and as sound a body as any soldier who ever bore arms.

CHAPTER XXIV

AT THE STONE BRIDGE

THERE was work for the Clayborne troop to do. "The cavalry is the eye of an army;" and the Army of Northern Virginia, hemmed in on every side, with the coil being drawn closer and tighter every moment, had double use for all its eyes. Before daylight boots and saddles sounded and the men were in motion. Clifford, who had washed his face in a muddy pool, had not yet broken his fast because there was nothing more to eat. So he rode with his battalion; like a true soldier of fortune dismissing all thought of breakfast and waiting for an opportunity to dine. This came to him sooner than he had dared hope. A young wild turkey rose with a cry from its cover in the woods, and sailing over their heads swept out in plain view over an adjoining field. Quick as thought Clifford snatched the carbine from a trooper's hand and shot the bird on the wing. The creature, wounded, fell to the ground and trailed across the fields in an attempt to escape. A touch of the spurs, and Dixie cleared the fence with a bound. Off across the ploughed ground rode Clifford in pursuit of his meal, while the men encouraged him with cheers

and laughter. The race was uneven; the man overtook the hunted bird. Leaning low in the saddle he caught it up from the ground, and with a twist of the neck put the poor creature out of pain and secured his own dinner, which he brought triumphantly back at his saddle-bow.

Thus did the Clayborne troopers live. When they got food they ate, and when they lacked it they went without. It was much simpler to travel unhampered by either base of supplies or commissary department; and if the method had its disadvantages, the men made a virtue of necessity and fed or starved as fortune decreed.

Night found the Clayborne troopers still in the saddle. The day had not been uneventful. They had captured a wagon train of provisions. They had taken a few score of prisoners; from the former they replenished their empty haversacks; from the latter they extracted what information they could as to the movements of the enemy. There was a jubilant air about these prisoners, an augury of victory which caused Colonel Joe to exercise a quality for which he was not usually noted, — caution. He felt convinced that this handful of men were the outriders of a larger force, for in spite of having fallen into a snare they maintained the assurance of victors.

Colonel Clayborne fed his men heartily, and made preparations for the night with unusual care. He put out a double line of pickets, sent out scouts on every side, and gave orders that every man

should sleep with his horse tethered to his arm. At the first warning note the Clayborne troop must be ready for action.

Clifford Clayborne noticed with interest that his riding within the past forty-eight hours had been in a circuit; he now saw that the troop was within a mile of the "cross-roads." He at once dispatched scouts to watch this point, and report whether the enemy was approaching by any of the bisecting roads. More familiar with the region than any man in the regiment, Clifford had been intrusted with the selection of the site for bivouac, and he chose a spot admirably guarded against surprises. It was in a wooded ravine through which ran a brawling stream swollen with the spring rains. Directly in front of them the road traversed an old stone bridge. No force could approach them without first crossing this narrow way. The noise of the rushing stream drowned all ordinary sounds, but the many quick-eared, keen-eyed men sent out on every side would be able to sound the alarm long before any danger could come near.

Colonel Joseph Clayborne and his son, rendered delightfully comfortable and warm inside by a generous supply of the enemy's bacon and coffee, sat smoking their pipes in quiet companionship.

This family communion had lasted but a short time when a rider appeared through the darkness over the bridge. He was closely followed by another. These men reported hastily to their colonel. Quickly casting aside their pipes and their ease,

the Clayborne troopers sprang to the saddle, and at an order from their chief waited in the shadow of the ravine. Fast came the scouts with the report that the enemy was approaching in force, preceded by a detachment of mounted men. Colonel Clayborne drew his men up across the road before the bridge and waited. There were only five hundred of them, but they were in the possession of a strategic point.

"Boys," said the colonel, "the Yankees are approaching in force. We 've got a good point of defense, and we must hold them in check for a while. They 'll think all hell has broken loose when they try to cross this bridge."

No other course than that of fighting entered the head of the old colonel. He dispatched a man to his commander-in-chief, informing him as to what was about to take place, and then waited calmly. Another scout brought in word that the approaching men numbered one thousand, and that they were leading the main column by a good bit. Clayborne smiled grimly. "The careless cusses! so much the better for us," was all he said.

The colonel was right. "All hell" did break loose in the cañon when the Union force set foot upon the bridge.

With the "rebel yell" the Clayborne troop dashed forward. In the dim light it was impossible for the Federals to tell the size of the foe which had attacked them so suddenly, but they were fresh from recent success. The rebel yell

was answered by the Union cheer, and a close hand to hand fight ensued. Only a small portion of the men on either side could be engaged. These fought fiercely for the possession of the bridge.

At such a time as this Colonel Clayborne was a leader who would rush in where the blows were thickest. He would have been knocked on the head a dozen times in the course of his career had not a bodyguard of devoted followers always made it their duty to protect him, and sometimes drag him bodily to the rear. Now the old fellow, swearing like the trooper he was, charged into the thickest of the skirmish, and laid about him like a blacksmith sweating at his anvil. The Union men by sheer force of numbers carried the bridge, to find themselves confronted by the rest of the Confederate force. The mêlée became general, and with odds at two to one the Clayborne horse were slowly forced backward.

Clifford Clayborne, mounted upon his finest horse, seemed to be an especial mark for the Union riders. Two men had forced him a hundred yards along the bank of the stream, and were on the point of closing in upon him when the horse of one of them slipped and threw his rider. With a yell, Clifford rode at his remaining adversary. With an answering shout the Union officer met his attack halfway. The two men were equally matched. The Federal was the larger, Clifford was the better mounted. Back and forth along the bank of the stream they struggled, fen-

cing more by the sense of touch than sight in the dim light of evening. Both were superb horsemen, and their spirited animals wheeled and circled at the touch of the spur and bridle, sometimes in dire peril of falling over the bank into the water.

It was a fight to the end between these two, now isolated from the combat going on a little distance beyond. Twice Clifford's sword touched his adversary slightly, while he himself was unscathed. Still the Union man struck back vigorously until his sword broke at the hilt. With a cry of exultation Clifford raised his own sword to strike again. Before it could descend to do its final work his wrist was caught in the grasp of the other's right. There was a twist, and Clifford's own weapon was thrown from his hand. Unarmed, the two men grappled with each other in fury. A sudden plunge of his horse, and the Union man was thrown from the saddle, dragging Clifford with him.

Down the bank the two struggling human beings rolled into the swiftly flowing water. There Clifford shook himself free from the grasp of his antagonist, and rising to the surface struck out to regain the shore. The current was swift, and had instantly whirled the two men out into the middle of the stream. Clifford was uninjured, and a strong swimmer he succeeded in reaching the shore with a few strokes. The bank was steep, but catching at an overhanging root he held on firmly and looked over his shoulder to see what had become of his enemy. He saw the man rise to the

surface, and strike out for the shore. Then suddenly he went under. Coming to the surface, he stretched out his arms appealingly with a cry, and sank again.

The water had cooled Clifford Clayborne's blood. He had made his fight and won. Without a thought he plunged back under the flood and caught at the drowning man. The latter, thinking his enemy had come to complete his work, struggled feebly. Clifford swam with him towards the shore. The burden was heavy and the current swift. For some moments it looked as if both men would be drowned. Clifford, with his hand once firmly fastened to his enemy's collar, would not let go his hold. Nearly spent, he reached the shore, and summoning all his remaining strength clambered up, dragging the Union cavalry man after him. "You are too good a fighter to drown like a blind pup," exclaimed Clifford as soon as he could draw breath, and he felt for his flask. The other lay limp and helpless on the grass. Clifford lifted the man's head upon his knee; bending close over him he forced the whiskey flask between the cold lips, and saw *it was his brother Gordon.* There are some emotions too deep for words. Clifford made no sound. He quietly forced the liquor down Gordon's throat, then waited painfully. The seconds passed. Gordon stirred, opened his eyes. Without speaking Clifford gave his brother a few more drops of whiskey. Gordon now sat up and looked wildly around.

"Do you know who I am, Gordon?" said Clifford, his voice trembling.

"Yes," replied the other simply, "you are my brother Clifford."

"God knows I did not mean it, old fellow. God knows we were both in ignorance, but, old man, you 'll forgive me."

"I will, Clifford; help me up. I 'm stiff and cold."

Clifford lifted his brother to his feet. Gordon steadied himself on Clifford's shoulder, looked about him, and regaining possession of all his faculties said calmly, "It was a close call, Clifford."

Clifford Clayborne caught his brother in his arms, while he sobbed out, "Gordon, old man, I never thought to hug a damned Yankee soldier, but damn you, Gordon, I 'm glad I did not kill you."

The battle at the bridge was over. The Clayborne troopers had been forced to yield to superior numbers. They had been driven back, fighting valiantly. Nothing remained but the dead and wounded. Clifford's horse, trained to answer the call of his master, was quietly cropping the grass near at hand. Gordon's mount had disappeared, but there were several riderless steeds straying in the vicinity.

"Can you ride, Gordon?" asked Clifford?

"I reckon I 'm able to go a little distance, Clifford."

"Then you shall come with me."

"As a prisoner of war?" inquired Gordon.

"No," was the reply. "You were as good as dead when I fished you up from the river. You can go wherever you will."

"I reckon I 'm laid up for repairs for a day or so, Clifford."

Clifford looked anxiously into his brother's face. "Are you much hurt? Tell me, old fellow, you 'll pull through all right."

"I will be all right shortly, Clifford. It 's only a little blood spilt and a lot of water swallowed."

Again Clifford hesitated. "Gordon," he said earnestly, "our side is sore pressed. We 're in desperate straits and every man is needed. I 've got to be in at the death."

"All right, old man, go — but I shall find you again, shall I not, Clifford?"

"I shall be with the Army of Northern Virginia, under Lee. Wherever that is you will find me, if I 'm above ground."

"God grant that you will be kept above ground for many years," said Gordon earnestly, while he pressed his brother's hand with affection.

"Gordon," said Clifford warmly, "you need rest and shelter at least until morning. Will you do as I tell you?"

"I will, Clifford."

"A mile beyond the bridge are some cross-roads."

Gordon nodded. "I recollect."

"A few hundred yards back from the road

stands an old house. You can find shelter there. If it should fall into the hands of the Federals you will be safe, and if it is occupied, our people " —

" I shall be taken prisoner," interrupted Gordon with a laugh.

" No. You 've taken me prisoner, and I 've captured you, Gordon, so we 'll exchange. Can you find the house ? "

" Yes, my boy. Good-by — until we meet again ; " and the two men, riding in opposite directions, disappeared into the night.

CHAPTER XXV

THE TENANTS OF THE CROSS-ROADS

KILBY had great admiration for Regina Bowie; he had also a wholesome respect for Clifford Clayborne; besides this he had rather a kind heart. He obeyed Regina, and held Marjorie a prisoner; he remembered Major Clayborne's parting injunction, and treated her with respect; he followed the natural promptings of his nature, and tried to make the imprisonment as easy for the captive as possible.

On the lower floor of the house, on the left of the hallway, were three rooms. The first contained a few chairs and a table; otherwise the room was bare. The second room was still more sparsely furnished. A pile of army blankets rolled up in the corner and two or three saddles on the floor indicated that here the scouts slept stretched upon the floor, their feet in their boots and their heads on their saddles. Beyond this was a large chamber used as a storeroom and kitchen. The room was full of food supplies and munitions of war, from knives and rifles to bits and bridles and other articles of horses' gear. Kilby had given the captive the liberty of these three rooms, and then

he and his debauched companion, Galloway, had withdrawn to another part of the house. The "drunkard" had slept off his debauch and come out of it blear-eyed and bad-tempered. At Kilby's order he had brought in some water from the well. He obeyed the order surlily, then he walked into the room where Marjorie was seated spiritless before the dying embers of the fire. He stood before her. Although sober at the present moment, he was more unpleasant to the eye in the glare of day than he was when drunk by candlelight. His red frouzy hair and beard, his bloodshot eye, and his purple face made him look like a hideous red monster. He thrust his huge face down to hers; she drew back with a shudder.

Kilby entered. "Galloway," he said sharply, "have I got to fight you again? Remember my orders are to be obeyed. Come with me now." The Irishman growled an inaudible reply. The two men went out together, and Marjorie Ware was alone. She had not been left alone for many minutes when she roused herself with the spirit of determination which was her father's and his ancestors before him. She examined carefully every possible avenue of escape. The windows had all been closed by heavy shutters securely nailed. The outside door leading from the kitchen was locked. The prospect was dispiriting. She realized the importance of retaining her self-command and keeping up her courage, but the situation was almost unbearable. At times she felt as if she

must give vent to her feelings and cry out; but the fear that such an outburst would bring in the red monster Galloway always deterred her. Thus the hours dragged by, in solitude and increasing anxiety. Finally, after an interminable time, she could not tell whether twenty-four or twice that number of hours had passed, she heard the tramp of marching feet. For more than an hour the sound lasted. She could not tell whether it came from friend or foe, but somehow it gave her courage.

In the silence that followed she became possessed of the feeling that she was entirely alone in the house; there was that intense stillness which is almost audible. She could hear a cricket chirping in another room, she could hear boards crack in a remote corner of the building; but there was no sound of footsteps, no sound of human voices. She resolved to find out if possible whether the two men had gone away. Going into the kitchen, she examined the outside door. It was of pine, but of double thickness and braced with iron. There were a number of guns in a corner; one of these she took, and using the butt as a sledge, rained blows upon the panel of the door. The noise reverberated through the house. She made a number of large dents in the wood, but the stock of the gun broke, and she could not make any serious impression on the door. The house was as silent as ever.

Marjorie now felt sure that her captors had

left her for the time being to her own devices. Although there was a sense of utter loneliness in her situation, the thought that the blear-eyed Galloway was not under the same roof gave her a feeling of relief. She knew that she must not give way to despair. She thought of her father, she thought of the Union troops who were doubtless at that very moment closing in upon the enemy, and she felt sure that there was a power which would carry her through this present ordeal and bring her safely back to her own friends and kindred. Kilby and Galloway, from a safe retreat among the trees, had observed the passing troops. They were Yankee soldiers. When the last blue coat had filed by, the two men, going farther back to the spot in the woods where their horses were concealed, had ridden away, leaving the house behind the trees entirely unwatched.

Marjorie Ware did not try to sleep, but walked back and forth from room to room like a caged animal, trying to hit upon some plan of escape. She had eaten nothing during all this time, and though fear and excitement had driven away all appetite she made up her mind to take some food to keep up her strength. There were corn meal, water, and materials for a fire right at hand. She made some cakes, which to her surprise tasted good. She felt her strength revive. In order to occupy herself, more than from any other reason, she began to search among the boxes and barrels. Among these she discovered a small keg of gun-

powder. Instantly a plan of action suggested itself. She knocked in the head of the keg, and took out a supply of the explosive. She did not know how much would be required, so she guessed at it. Then she selected from among the few kitchen utensils an iron kettle. She poured the gunpowder into the receptacle, and placed it against the door. With great care she manufactured a thin fuse out of paper and a little gunpowder. She had no idea how long the fuse would burn; it was all a matter of guesswork. This fuse she ran down the nozzle of the pot and out on to the floor.

When all was prepared she contemplated the bomb, which she had thus improvised, with great curiosity and some alarm. She wondered what the result would be if she should touch off the fuse and retire precipitately into the farthest room. Would the door be blown out? or would the entire house be wrecked? This was a problem of dynamics which could only be solved by experiment. It was a desperate expedient, but her situation was desperate. To her anything seemed preferable than to remain longer a prisoner, with the thought of the return of the red monster. Right at hand was the fire. One touch of a burning brand to the fuse, and her problem would be solved; and yet she hesitated. She took a piece of pine wood in her hand and ignited one end of it, stood in the middle of the room with the shell at her feet, and still she hesitated.

The latch of the door moved. Some one had his hand upon it on the outside. Her heart stood still with fear. Could it be Kilby with his companion, the red monster? Rather than have him in the room with her again, rather than see his face again close to hers, she would put the fire to the powder, though she and all of them might be killed. What if she should do it now while they were unsuspectingly opening the door? She could not bring herself to do it — yet; but waited, breathless, her heart beating wildly, her eyes burning like the fire in her hand. She could not find voice to cry out, but stood in silence, waiting. The person outside made an ineffectual effort to push open the door, then turned away, and Marjorie heard his tread going along the side of the house to the front, where he began fumbling at the shutters. A few heavy blows rained upon them, a shutter was thrown to the ground, the window flew open, and the man sprang quickly into the front room.

Then Marjorie found her voice and cried aloud: "Stop where you are, for if you enter this room it will be to your death!" The footsteps did not halt, but came hastily nearer. "Stop, I command you, if you wish to live!" she cried hysterically, as a large figure came to the doorway.

The stranger stood gazing at her in amazement. He was not the red monster nor Jake Kilby.

She threw the burning wood from her as he pronounced her name, "Marjorie Ware," and came

quickly to her; and then she was clinging to his arm.

She could have wept for joy at the sight of him. The dangers through which she had passed, the fears which had assailed her, had left her weaker than she knew. "Mr. Clayborne," she cried, "what good angel directed you here? Oh, I have been so terribly frightened; I have endured so much! Take me away with you; take me away!" There was a sob in her voice as she spoke, and she clung closer to him, not noticing that his shirt was stiff with blood. He winced a little with the pain, but said in a soft, reassuring voice, "Don't be afraid, little girl, I'll take you away. You're quite safe now."

"You're wounded, Mr. Clayborne!" she cried suddenly, in alarm. "Oh, you're wounded and in pain!"

"Wounded, yes, very slightly, but not in pain — now," he replied.

"Come quickly, and let me dress your hurt," she said in a tone of anxiety, quite forgetting all her fears.

"It is merely a slight cut; it amounts to nothing. Tell me" — he began.

"Don't question me now," she said, between tears and laughter; "I am the nurse, and must wash and dress your wound. Oh, who gave it to you? Some villain of a rebel of course."

"Oh, it is not of great consequence; it is really much slighter than it appears," he repeated, trying

to soothe her. "Tell me about yourself, and explain why I find you here."

"I will tell you, but not now. Oh, I have had such a terrible experience! I have seen so much! I know so much more about some things than I did a few days ago!" She looked into his face. "Are you suffering very much, poor Mr. Clayborne?" she asked with deep sympathy. "Oh, I must help you. I am a nurse, and can do it so easily."

"I would gladly suffer ten times as much for the pleasure of seeing you and of feeling your gentle touch," he replied, yielding to her entreaties, and sitting down while her quick fingers put aside his coat to gently cut away the shirt and put cool water on the wound.

"Oh, don't talk like that, Mr. Clayborne. Don't pay me compliments now. I can do so little."

When she had finished dressing his wound, and had brought him some food, which he ate heartily, she came and stood by his side, saying wistfully, "Do you think you will be able to go a little distance now, Mr. Clayborne? Before I tell you anything more, before anything else, we must get away from here."

"Yes, yes," he answered; "but is it necessary? I must confess I am pretty well tired out. I came to this place for shelter. There is less danger here than elsewhere, little comrade."

He spoke to her in the same soft tone he had always used, just as if nothing had ever come between them.

Then she related hurriedly what had happened to her in that house. When he tried to interrupt her with exclamations of surprise or with questions, she bade him listen until the end. He sat with flashing eyes and clinched hands. Many things she had to omit for lack of time, but when she ended he had heard enough to set his blood on fire.

"To think of it!" he cried, rising to his feet, and pacing the floor in anger. "To treat a woman so; to treat you so! And Clifford interfered in your behalf, did he? Ah, Clifford would never do otherwise. And Regina Bowie! It was Regina Bowie who kept you here?" There was a bitterness in the accent with which he spoke the name, there was a wrathful flash in his eyes which made Marjorie almost afraid of him. She had flushed at the sound of the woman's name, but remained silent, looking at Gordon steadily, while everything she had seen and heard in that room a few hours before flashed once more through her brain.

"And Francis Ware, your brother — you say he was here with her," Gordon went on. "Marjorie, I tried to keep from you the knowledge of his desertion. I thought you could not bear to know it."

"Oh, it was so generous of you," she cried, "but useless, quite useless."

Gordon sat down in the chair. "Little girl," he said seriously, "it 's dark, you are very much fatigued, and so am I. We can't go far from here

this night. There 's no more danger for you now. Are you afraid to stay here until morning?"

"Not with you. I have no fear now that you are here," she said.

Gordon brought in some blankets, and made a couch for Marjorie on the floor of the inner chamber. Then with some nails which he found in the kitchen he repaired the broken shutter, like a careful general making the place secure. "You can sleep in perfect safety to-night, Marjorie, and to-morrow at daylight we will go away." Withdrawing to the farther room, he wrapped himself in a blanket, and stretching out before the threshold of the room where Marjorie lay, he fell almost immediately asleep.

For the first time in two nights Marjorie slept. She was thoroughly exhausted and her slumber was deep and restful. Once or twice she partially awoke, and with a feeling of perfect security turned on her bed of blankets and fell into a dreamless sleep. Gordon, on his part, was spent with fatigue; he hardly stirred in the spot where he had thrown himself. So during all the night youth slept serenely in the old house; and thus the morning found them each rolled in the gray blankets, unmindful of discomfort, unconscious of peril. Gordon was the first to awaken. He had been living over in his dreams the fight upon the bridge. He heard again the thunder of horses' hoofs, the shouts of the enemy, as they rode at him in the attack. He thought that he lifted his

sword in defense. He sprang forward and found himself in the middle of the floor, and rubbing his eyes became aware of a terrific hammering on the outer door. He was wide awake upon the instant, and going into the kitchen demanded in a loud tone to know who was there.

"Open the door!" replied a gruff voice.

"Tell me what you want, first," he answered quickly.

"To get into the house, you fool," was the rejoinder.

Marjorie, who had been awakened by the disturbance, came and stood at his elbow. "Do not open," she whispered. Gordon turned and noticed that she was trembling. He gave her a reassuring look.

"Come with me," he whispered, leading her away.

"What are you going to do?" she asked in the same manner, following him.

"I am going upstairs, where I can get a good look at them."

"We are locked in here in the lower part of the house," she answered. Gordon tried the door leading into the hallway. Then drawing his revolver he demolished the lock with a shot, and led the way to the floor above. Throwing open a window, he looked directly down upon four men who were stamping impatiently in the rear of the house. They were all ugly looking specimens, with scowling faces. One of them had a red scar across his face

from eye to chin. It was a recent cut, freshly healed, and had almost severed the nose. Marjorie peered down upon them under Gordon's elbow. He gently pushed her back from the window. The man with the scarred face gazed up in surprise. "Where in h—— did you come from?" he demanded brutally.

"Never mind that. State your business or get out," answered Gordon with equal brusqueness.

"Business! I like that," cried the other fiercely. "Ye damned Yank, surrender!" and he drew a pistol with a flourish.

Quick as lightning Gordon drew back, even as the report of the pistol rang out.

Marjorie gave a cry and sprang forward. "Are you hit?" she exclaimed in terror.

"No, little comrade," he replied with a reassuring smile, while his hand sought the butt of his revolver.

He had noticed that none of the men wore the Confederate uniform. They all bore the stamp of free-booting guerrillas, with which the country at the closing of the war was overrun.

"Surrender, dang yer!" cried the men in concert. "Surrender," echoed the first spokesman, "or it will go hard with yer!"

"One of the men is the red monster. He is the short, stout creature, with one eye and the bloated face," whispered Marjorie. "Do not trust any of them. If Kilby were among them it might be different, but I am terribly afraid of them."

"Do not have the slightest fear, little comrade," said Gordon with a coolness which could not help but inspire confidence. Then speaking aloud he said emphatically, "I am a prisoner of Major Clifford Clayborne of the Clayborne Horse. I am on parole and staying here under his orders. I cannot surrender to you."

There was silence for a moment; then the hoarse voice of the red Galloway replied: —

"It 's lyin' ye are; and as for the young woman, she was left in my keepin'."

"She is under my protection," answered Gordon.

"None of that now," croaked the hoarse voice. "She has been in my keepin' for the last two days; so open the dure, now, or there 'll be foighting."

"You red dog," shouted Gordon fiercely, "I 'll brain the first man who tries to enter here!"

"Damn yer, we 'll soon settle both of yer!" was the savage retort.

"I 'll give you one minute to go on about your business," cried Gordon.

The only answer was a fierce pounding below.

Gordon leaned from the window and shot quickly down among them. The men ran precipitately around the corner of the house. Gordon had not paused to take aim, but one of them carried a bullet in his arm. There was silence for a moment. Then the wounded man cried with an oath, "We 'll have yer heart's blood for this! The blood of both of yez shall pay for this!"

Marjorie looked up at Gordon, but she did not speak.

His face was fierce with anger. At the sight of her his look softened to one of tenderness. "Don't be afraid," he said in his reassuring tone.

"I won't," she said, speaking very low.

"Marjorie," he said, taking her hand in his, "they 'll only get you over my dead body, and I don't think there 'll be much of them left to harm you then."

For a moment she turned away her head, not trusting herself to speak; then in a low voice she answered: —

"I shan't be alive then, either; but before that time comes, if it is to come, I want you to know how much I respect and admire you. I remember what you said to me long ago. Gordon, I want to tell you now that I love you."

She pressed her head very gently against the sleeve of his coat. With his left hand, the other still holding the loaded revolver, he drew her to him and kissed her for the first time. "Little comrade," he whispered, "don't you worry about anything. There are years of happiness ahead for you and me."

She did not answer in words, but raised her eyes, and in them he saw that light which only comes to a woman's eyes when she looks at the man she loves.

"LITTLE COMRADE . . . DON'T YOU WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING"

CHAPTER XXVI

FOUR STURDY KNAVES

THE four men had withdrawn to the shelter of the pine woods. The four had been the shining lights in a band of guerrillas. With Kilby as their captain, they had for years been leading the wild life of irregular warfare. Kilby had held these turbulent spirits in some sort of subjection, and through the force of a strong arm and a ready hand had been able to exact a certain degree of obedience. Kilby was now lying stiff and cold in a ditch with a bullet hole in his heart. His band had been blown to the four winds by Sheridan's cavalry, and when a handful of the most lawless spirits gathered together again, they found themselves without a leader; and with the end of the war in sight their occupation was no more. They chose a new head, and formed a new band of free lances, whose common enemy was the world at large, whose booty was wherever it could be taken.

The new leader was a giant; he with the scar. At a toss of the hat he would have fought against anybody for anything. The scar across his face was not the only mark of conflict which his body bore. He was suspected of having served his ap-

prenticeship to arms under a black flag on the open sea. In evidence of this he showed a chest decorated by numerous seams and gashes, and spoke somewhat affectionately of the bullets encased in his huge carcass. He was chosen leader because of this distinction ; also because he would not follow.

Two of his fraternity were birds from a Richmond jail. They had been drafted into the Confederate service, which they had promptly deserted for the laxer discipline and more alluring prospects of guerrilla warfare. Now led by the buccaneer they cheerfully embraced the vocation of highwaymen, which was no new trade to them, for they had always stood ready to rob anything which promised booty, from a chicken coop to a church altar.

Kilby's drunken lieutenant Galloway was the last of the four. Marjorie feared this red-headed, red-bearded, red-faced monster more than any of the others ; but although he was more repulsive he was really less formidable, for drink and the devil had laid strong hands upon him and had weakened much of his strength. Red Galloway, knowing that the house near the cross-roads held a quantity of arms, ammunition, and other booty, had suggested to his confrères that it would be wise economy to secure immediate possession of these supplies. His cronies needed little prompting on this score, and the congenial quartette set out at once for the rendezvous, to find it occupied by one other besides the young woman whom red

Galloway had told them was locked up there for safe-keeping.

Now that this unexpected tenant had made such a spirited resistance, the four stood ready to parley with him, — to make terms provided they could get access to the spoils; to make promises if necessary to gain their end, and to break these promises as soon as they got what they wished.

But Gordon Clayborne knew the men with whom he had to deal. The only terms they could make with him would be to leave him in peace. He would have sooner thought of cutting off both his hands than of surrendering at the call of such rascals. Like all the Claybornes, Gordon had been born into the world with a contempt for fear; but several years of war had developed a certain amount of caution in his brain. He had Marjorie's safety to look out for at present; so he improved the lull in hostilities to strengthen his own position. He knew that he could not hold the lower part of the house against the united attack of the four desperadoes, but from the upper story he could command a great advantage. There Marjorie and he took up their positions. They could see the four marauders flitting among the trees which surrounded the house. The miscreants did not venture to attack them openly, the bullet which one of them had received in the arm having taught them caution; but an occasional pistol-shot crashing into the room through a window showed that they had no idea of relinquishing their object.

With Marjorie's help, Gordon barricaded the windows with materials brought up from the kitchen, and through a loophole between two sacks of meal watched with comparative safety the movements of the enemy.

The sun rose high in the heavens, and there was no change in their relative positions. Marjorie went down into the kitchen and cooked some corn-meal and bacon, while Gordon never relaxed his vigilance, feeling sure that his besiegers were not men to wait in patience for any length of time.

The girl soon returned with some food, which they shared like two soldiers of fortune. Gordon brought up all the chairs and the heavy table, and piled them at the head of the stairs; this furniture he tied firmly together with a stout piece of rope which was found among the supplies below. It would have to be a fierce and determined attack which could carry their barricade. The ammunition and guns among the stores were not forgotten. Marjorie helped to load all the guns, and place them near at hand ready for instant use.

The day passed; the afternoon began to wane, and they were still unmolested. Gordon became uneasy. He had expected and hoped that the outlaws would attack at once in broad daylight. He did not credit them with enough self-restraint to wait until night, and he was more apprehensive as to the result of an assault under cover of darkness. He could catch occasional glimpses of one or more of the men lurking among the trees.

With chagrin he had seen them lead away his horse which had been picketed in the woods. He had fired upon them through the window, but all to no avail; he could not draw his besiegers to an assault. With stubborn and sullen patience they hovered in the shadow of the trees like birds of ill-omen, waiting for the darkness.

As a matter of fact, one reason for their forbearance was the wholesome respect for Clayborne which his first vigorous reception of them had engendered. He had inflicted a more serious wound upon one of his enemies than he himself knew. This was the red monster, Galloway, whose arm had been so shattered by the bullet as to render amputation necessary. This operation had to be performed in a rough way by one of his mates, and the unhappy creature lay groaning upon a pile of boughs, where without proper medical assistance he bade fair to end his earthly career as he had lived, in passion and drink, cursing roundly at his fate, and crying out imprecations against the cause of his present misfortune. With their number thus reduced, the remaining three, ordinarily as desperate men as ever embarked in an unlawful calling, curbed their impatience from sheer necessity, waiting restlessly for nightfall, their passions heated and their rage augmented by whiskey.

Gordon saw the shadows lengthen with more anxiety than he showed to Marjorie. He tried to interest her and divert her mind from any thought of danger. Although he never for a moment re-

laxed the vigilance of his lookout, he found time to tell many of the things which had happened since they had last parted. It was not a difficult matter to interest Marjorie, for she loved him. For months she had struggled to repress her love, she had fought against it with all her might; but it had proved too strong for her, and now that all her doubts of him had been dispelled, now that she had been brought to tell him of her love, she trusted him implicitly. To hear the sound of his voice, to feel his presence near, created an intoxication of excitement which caused her to forget past terrors, to ignore the present danger. For he was there to defend her, with him by her side she could feel no fear.

It was no time for love-making with a desperate enemy in ambush near at hand. It was no time for the exchange of vows of eternal affection and the making of plans for life-long happiness, when all about them stalked relentless war, and human life was as uncertain as the shifting sand. The pair spoke no word of love, but love can make itself known in a hundred ways without the spoken word. Gordon could not talk to her upon any subject without telling her by the accent of his voice that he loved her. Marjorie could not look into his face without her eyes betraying that she adored him.

As night settled down, Gordon's watchfulness increased. He walked from one window to another, peering cautiously out on every side, in his

endeavor to see and frustrate the first attempt at an attack. The moon had risen early, and as her beams sifted through the swaying pines, throwing fantastic shadows on the house, Gordon thought that he could discern moving figures of men. Once or twice he fired a shot from his revolver, but this brought forth no response. He had merely fired at a shadow in the night. Could it be possible, he argued, that the ruffians had given up the siege as hopeless and gone away, leaving him to combat shadows?

As if in answer to this thought there came a sudden rush of feet and a crash against one of the doors. Gordon fired repeatedly, but without effect. With an answering yell of defiance his assailants broke into the house. What Gordon had feared had happened. Under cover of the night they had forced a sudden entrance.

Marjorie looked up into Gordon's face. "There is but one stairway," he whispered. "We can hold that against twice their number. Can you shoot, Marjorie?"

In reply she took up the lightest of the rifles and knelt beside him at the barricade. He placed a revolver in her hand. "You can handle this with greater ease," he said. "Now take up your place behind me, and if I give the word shoot under my arm. Mind, Marjorie, shoot low; and only when I tell you."

Heavy heels were heard in the room below, and a voice called out, "Now will yer surrender?"

"Come up and take us," was the terse reply.

"Not such fools as that. We have a better way."

"Take it then," was the laconic response.

"We will that." There was a few minutes' hurried consultation below; then spoke the leader. "There 's a keg of powder here. We 'll give yer thirty minutes to come down, else ye 'll go up higher still."

"Will they do it?" whispered Marjorie, laying a hand on Gordon's sleeve. The expression on his face answered her.

"I am not afraid, for we shall be together, Gordon," she whispered.

For a moment his arm was about her while he spoke low in her ear.

"Well, what have you to say?" was the impatient cry from below.

"If you do us the slightest injury every one of you shall be hanged."

"Yes, if we 're caught, but we have no fear of that. Say, will you come down?"

"No!"

"Then up yer go in thirty minutes," and the parley closed with an oath.

Gordon Clayborne knew that he had to deal with desperate men who, with their passions once aroused, would stop at nothing. He could hear the tramp of their feet as they worked away, removing from the house all the materials which they wished to save. With a few whispered words

in Marjorie's ear, he left her to guard the barrier for a moment, with the injunction to call out to him at once if the marauders made any move towards the stairway. Then he stole silently into one of the back rooms.

If Marjorie and he could only get down to the ground in the rear of the house and, undiscovered, reach the shelter of the woods, he felt that in the darkness they could evade pursuit. Silently he raised the window. There was a fresh wind blowing which sent the clouds scudding across the sky and made the branches of the dark pines and hemlocks murmur as if in conversation among themselves. It was a friendly sound, a soothing sound. In the rooms below the rough, blood-stained men could be heard carrying out the barrels and boxes of supplies. This they did noisily, with loud-tongued argument freely spiced with oaths. Outside the fragrant woods suggested peace, offering a sanctuary from the threatened danger. Clayborne carefully measured with his eye the distance to the ground. It was about fifteen feet. If he could only devise means to swing Marjorie to the ground, he could follow her, and then they could get away together. Gordon remembered the rope which he had brought upstairs, and did not hesitate a moment in the execution of his plan. There was not a moment to waste in irresolution. Stealthily he returned to where he had left Marjorie. She was an alert and watchful little sentinel.

"They are still busy over their looting," she

said. "Is it almost time for us to say good-by?" She spoke with a touching calmness which won his lasting admiration. He pressed her arm softly while he told her of his project. With her face close to his in the darkness, with her breath on his cheek, he felt his heart leap as she whispered. "I will do anything you say, go anywhere you direct. I feel safe when you are with me."

Gordon quickly unwound the rope which he had used in building the barricade. Testing it, he found, to his delight, that it was strong enough to hold twice his weight.

"Come," he said, leading the way.

Marjorie shivered with excitement as she felt the fresh night wind blow in her face.

"As soon as your feet touch the ground," said Gordon, "make for that large clump of trees over there on the right. Do you see it?"

"Yes."

"Our enemies are all busy on exactly the opposite side of the house. I shall follow you directly. The chances are we shall not be seen; but whatever happens, do not stop running. Whatever happens, do not wait for me."

"I *shall* wait for you," she replied, looking at him, her eyes shining brightly.

Marjorie stood on the window sill, the knotted end of the rope held between her hands.

"Are you quite sure you can let me down? I am afraid I shall prove too heavy for you," she said anxiously.

"You are not so heavy but what I could hold you with one hand, little girl. Keep a tight hold until you feel your feet touch the ground," he counseled, "then let go and run for the shadow."

"And you," she replied, "will you surely be able to get down in safety?"

"Yes, of course I shall."

She clung to his shoulder for an instant, his lips touched hers. "Now ready," he whispered. Her fingers tightened on the rope. Instead of letting her go, Gordon caught her suddenly around the waist and swung her back into the middle of the room, while he dropped like a shot to the floor, raising his head to the level of the sill.

"Are you hurt, Gordon?" cried Marjorie with anxiety.

"Silence," motioned Gordon. Directly under the window walked the man whom Marjorie called the red monster. The fellow had been left to guard the outside of the house, while the other three came within. The stump of his amputated arm was roughly bandaged, and was evidently causing him much suffering, for he was whining as he walked. He was weak from pain and loss of blood, and had taken a good deal of whiskey to sustain himself. In his right hand he carried a large Colt's revolver; and although he was patrolling about the house, his eye was at the moment upon the ground. He passed exactly underneath the window, reached the angle of the house, then turned on his heel.

Gordon quickly made a slip-knot in the cord and rose to his feet. Galloway passed again beneath him and looked up. Down over his neck fell the noose, and was pulled taut. With the instinct of self-preservation the man's one free hand flew to his throat in time to be caught within the running noose; but the snare drawn by a strong hand closed about his neck. The cry that rose to his lips was stifled. Gordon had caught his fish, and stood for a moment undecided what to do. The red monster pulled desperately at the line. Gordon wound his end firmly about his hands, and pulled with all his young vigorous strength. The big fish heaved, but the stout cord held. There was a clatter and scramble, and up Red Galloway came with a rush. The veins were swelling on Gordon's forehead from the exertion, but he had his fish well in hand. Up to the level of the window came the red monster, his eye bulging from its socket, his purple face almost black, the breath nearly forced out of his body, great beads of sweat standing on his blotched forehead. Marjorie looked upon the scene almost petrified with horror. Gordon caught the man by the collar and landed him safely in upon the floor. There the fish lay gasping with no fight left in him.

"He 's beaten out for some time," said Gordon. "Now, Marjorie, to the window!" Quickly seizing the rope he swung her to the ground. Dropping to the ground by her side, he took her arm and together they ran to the cover of the trees. A

hundred yards they sped, then paused to take breath. "They 'll never find us in these woods to-night, little comrade," said Gordon gayly.

"Thank heaven, we are still alive!" exclaimed Marjorie. "Oh, Gordon! Oh, Gordon! what if they had killed you!"

"But they did n't, and we are both quite safe. Look and see if you cannot make out where their horses are picketed. We 'll take two of them."

"Oh, I must find Dolly," cried Marjorie, as they penetrated still farther into the forest.

"Where is the mare?"

"I left her in an old barn near the house."

"We cannot go so near, and she must have been discovered and taken away long ago," replied Gordon.

"Poor Dolly," sighed Marjorie gently.

As she spoke there was a roar and a flash. The mine had been exploded, and the house burst into flames.

"Those brutes have kept their word," cried Gordon, "and they must have blown up their own red monster — poor devil!"

The light showed him the horses straining at their tethers. They were not fifty yards away.

"Quick, Marjorie, before we are seen! Once mounted, we can leave them far behind." Before he had finished speaking the girl was running by his side toward the animals. She needed no assistance to spring to the saddle. The woods for many hundreds of yards around were too bright to

permit of concealment; the outlaws saw them at this instant, and with a yell ran towards them.

"Quick, Gordon, for the love of heaven!" cried Marjorie, her heart in her mouth. Releasing three of the frightened beasts, Gordon stampeded them, and then vaulting into the saddle of his own horse, he rode off with Marjorie by his side. Through the woods they rode, the yells and pistol shots sounding fainter and fainter in the distance. Then at last, striking out on the highway, they galloped on through the night. The moon sank behind the wooded hills, and only the stars remained shining kindly down upon the two. There was a wild excitement in the ride which set Marjorie's pulse on fire. She quickened the pace. Faster they flew, the wind blowing in their faces, the blood tingling in their veins.

"Do you remember our rides about Memphis, Marjorie?" asked Gordon,— "how we rode together three years ago?"

"Yes; but we never rode like this, Gordon. I never expected to ride by your side again."

"But I thought you would, Marjorie. I knew you would. Did you think I would give you up so easily?"

She turned her head toward him. He could not see all the expression of love on her face, but he could see her eyes shining at him brighter than they had ever shone before.

He could not speak. There was no need of words in this wild ride. To him the long years

that had passed seemed a dream. The present only seemed real. The present moment alone was life. What if to-morrow should be the end for him? To-night was his. To-night he lived indeed. She loved him, and he was riding by her side. So they rode in silence. In his ear rang the words, "Gordon, I love you," set to music by the rhythmical beating of the horses' hoofs, reëchoed by the wind, — the same refrain, "Gordon, I love you." While to her, the swaying treetops seemed to be repeating over and over, "Little comrade, there are years of happiness ahead for you and me." What to them was the morrow! The present was theirs. On and on they rode together through the night.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LAST OF THE CLAYBORNE HORSE

TWENTY-SEVEN thousand veterans, all that remained of the Army of Northern Virginia, surrendered at Appomattox. Silently they stacked the arms they had carried through the war, crowning them with the colors they had held aloft so long. Thin were their ranks, tattered their battle-flags. They had reached the last ditch.

The Clayborne troop, which four years before had ridden gayly to the front a thousand strong, now mustered a mere handful. The gorgeous trappings of the steeds, the brilliant uniforms of the riders, were no more. The men sat like statues on their horses, and saw the banners which they loved so dearly added to the pile. Reduced by hunger, ragged and unkempt, beaten out at last, these cavaliers had saved nothing from the ruin beyond the lustre of their valor and the brightness of their swords.

Colonel Clayborne, his gray hair uncovered to the wind, with neither coat nor vest, wrapped in a torn army blanket tied around his neck, kept his place at their head, the undying spirit of his courage burning to the end. "Boys," he said, his

voice choking with emotion, "we've fought our last fight together, we've ridden our last ride. You've been to me like sons, and before we part here, I should like to take every man of you to my heart." Then he and Clifford rode away, — the old man with bowed head, his frame shaken by sobs he made no effort to suppress; the young man with a face from which the smile had vanished.

"Where shall we go now, boy?" asked the colonel, lifting his eyes. "It seems as if there was nothing left for me to do. I should have laid my old bones where so many of my brave men have found their final rest."

"Father," replied Clifford, "why not go to our home?"

"Home," echoed the old man bitterly. "Who has a home now? Look at the land," he cried, with a sweeping gesture of the arm, "and answer who among us still has a home he can call his own. Can we expect to find our house standing and our belongings still secure?"

"Our home in Richmond is unharmed."

"How do you know?"

"I have received word to that effect."

"From whom?"

"Gordon."

"Your brother! Have you seen him?"

"I have seen him and embraced him. Will you not do so also?"

"Embrace an enemy?"

"Not as an enemy, but as your son. I know

we have reason to feel wrathful towards Gordon; but I 've told you how we met and fought it out at the stone bridge. I licked him there, and damn it all, dad, I can't feel any resentment against him now. Don't you think you could forgive him?"

"I am going home. Tell Gordon if he wants to see his old father before he dies he can come there," said the colonel wearily. "But, by Gad, sir," he flared out with his old spirit, "he 'll have to humble himself, Clifford, if he wants my forgiveness. Good-by, my lad. If the old roof-tree is still standing, you will know where to find me."

Clifford sat and watched the gray-head ride slowly away with dignity, while the tattered army blanket flapped in the wind. "Poor old dad," was all he said, but there was a catch in his voice, and driving his spurs suddenly into his horse's flanks, he made his animal spring forward with a start. He had ridden half a mile when he saw a well-known figure on horseback galloping towards him. It was Gordon Clayborne. The two brothers drew rein, facing each other.

Gordon was dressed in a fatigue uniform. It was new and neat, with freshly polished buttons. Clifford was as ragged as the roughest rider in his troop, and many a button had parted company with his coat. Both men were mounted on spirited horses, and in spite of the difference in their clothes they resembled each other strongly in bearing and manner.

"Clifford, I was coming in search of you," said the elder.

"And I for you," was the response; then in the next breath: "Gad, Gordon, you are a swell! Do you always dress like that, or did you put this on to overawe your ragged and unfortunate brother?"

"Nonsense, Clifford, this is no full dress, and you know it. You know also that if I have a coat there is another for you."

"I'll go naked before I'll put on one of those damned blue ones, Gordon; and as there seems to be little left of the gray, I think I shall leave the country. Perhaps I'll go to Mexico and offer my sword to Maximilian."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Clifford. You'll stay in this country. Did n't you get the word I sent you? The house in Richmond has been kept safe from fire and from thieves. My friend Chesterfield has just come from there. He saw to it that the property was protected by Union troops. And Clifford," continued his brother, "as you took me prisoner at the bridge, I am going to take you prisoner here. I want you to come with me."

"Lead on, then, but wherever you take me I shall not resent being introduced to a square meal; for to tell the truth, Gordon, I'm more than hungry."

"How damned thoughtless of me!" exclaimed Gordon reproachfully. "Twenty thousand rations

have been issued to feed you all. You shall have something to eat at once, my boy."

The two men rode off side by side. After the first cravings of Clifford's appetite had been appeased, Gordon placed his hand affectionately on his brother's arm.

"Old fellow," he said, "you did me a far greater service than you knew when you sent me to the house by the cross-roads."

"In what way?" asked Clifford quickly.

"Come with me and you shall see," replied Gordon. "You are still my prisoner, you know."

The paroling of Lee's vanquished troops was taking place as fast as the papers could be made out. The Claybornes passed long lines of Southern soldiers who filed slowly by to stack their arms and surrender their beloved standards. Many wore grim and sullen faces; others, with streaming eyes, reluctantly laid down their arms and tenderly kissed the tattered battle-flags, emblems to them of all that they had fought for, bled for, and lost. As Clifford looked, his own eyelashes were wet. From his war-stained comrades his eye swept over the great array of Union troops who stood, regiment upon regiment, in absolute silence, looking on with that sympathy which brave men feel for a gallant foe.

"We are beaten, Gordon," exclaimed Clifford, "beaten to the ground, but it has been done by force of numbers."

"It was written in the nation's destiny that it

should be so," was the rejoinder. "Believe me, brother, the day will come when you will say, 'It was better that it ended as it did.'"

"Never!" cried Clifford passionately. "We yield to fate, we accept the final arbitrament of arms, but never shall we cease to justify the righteousness of our cause."

A party of Union officers came slowly along the road, their horses walking leisurely while the riders talked and laughed together in the highest spirits. They felt that their work was nearly over, the great load had been at last lifted from their shoulders. They were the chieftains of the Federal army, and upon this bright April morning they made the air ring with their talk and laughter, like boys let out of school. At their head rode a man with closely trimmed beard. His coat was unbuttoned to the balmy air. He wore no sword nor any insignia of rank save the stars on his shoulder-straps, yet Clifford knew him at once to be the commander-in-chief of the armies of the United States. No signs of elation were on the general's face, but the anxious look, which had been there so constantly from the beginning of the campaign in the Wilderness until the fall of Richmond, had given place to one of peace. With unfaltering determination he had fought through a long and bloody war. He had won. He saw himself exalted by the people as no citizen of the Republic had ever been exalted, yet he bore his honors with the serenity of a mind truly great. With his head full of the

details of the surrender, he was generously planning to make the path as easy for the vanquished as could be done with justice. As he rode along he exchanged pleasantries with General Sheridan, who rode by his side, — Little Phil Sheridan, whose vivacious spirits were overflowing, who preferred fighting to food or rest, and who, before the last gun of the rebellion had been fired, was hot to carry war against the usurping French in Mexico.

"They are good soldiers," said Clifford, looking after them with mingled interest and respect. "They are great generals. To underrate them is to belittle our own. It is no disgrace to yield to such men; but Gordon, my boy, there is only one Bayard. They have conquered him at last. They have scattered his armies and taken him a prisoner, but in our hearts he will always be the peerless knight *sans peur et sans reproche.*"

"There are many such, Clifford," said Gordon, laying his hand affectionately on his brother's shoulder. "There are many 'preux chevaliers' upon both sides. I have seen them at the head of armies and in the ranks as well. The Rolands and Bayards live always."

"That is true," acquiesced Clifford, "but never has the title of knighthood been more truly worn than by our general. Since he has been obliged by fate to yield, it little matters what becomes of Clifford Clayborne. Take my sword and beat it into a ploughshare, load me with chains, Gordon. The iron cannot enter more deeply into my soul."

"Life is still young, Clifford, and our lives have just begun. A stern decree threw us upon opposite sides in a terrible struggle, but blood is thicker than water; we are now reunited and are friends — true friends, are we not, Clifford?"

"Yes, old man, we are," exclaimed Clifford, "though I must admit for a time I hated you in my heart. But when I pulled you, half drowned, out of the stream, I forgave you, Gordon."

"Stand by me, Clifford, for the rest of your life, and 'fore God I 'll stand by you. There will never be a dollar in my hand which I won't share with you."

"Gordon Clayborne," replied the younger man, "we 'll stand together in future, so help me God. I never want to cut you down again."

"Major Clayborne!" exclaimed a bluff voice. The two Claybornes looked in the direction whence it came, and Gordon recognized his old friend Chesterfield astride a small but vicious army mule, his bearded face streaked with perspiration, while he resisted the animal's efforts to throw the rider over his head. The stubborn brute was coming towards them with a motion suggestive of an acrobat turning handsprings. Although the gait was violent the progress was small; but Chesterfield, his long legs clasped tightly to the animal's sides, his notebooks and pencils flying in all directions, was not to be unseated or ruffled.

"Be patient, gentlemen," he called out cheerily, "and I shall reach you. We 've been traveling

like this for the last hundred yards, and both of us are getting rather used to it. He 'll bolt in a minute or I 'll miss my guess, and then you will see me pass you like a streak of greased lightning."

Chesterfield did miss his guess. The mule had a mind which was not to be read even by an astute newspaper correspondent. Arriving within a yard of the Claybornes, the animal threw himself down in the dirt with a shock, leaving Chesterfield to stand over him with an expression of reproach and surprise on his face. The mule, with a grunt of satisfaction, proceeded to roll comfortably in the dirt, oblivious to the two excited horses snorting above him. Chesterfield, however, gathered himself together and sat down upon the neck of the prostrate mule. The brute made no further attempt to move, but stretched out his nose in the dust with a sneeze, and closed his eyes contentedly, while a gentle twitching of his tail seemed to say, "I surrender, but what are you going to do about it?"

Chesterfield rose to his feet and surveyed the animal with a critical eye. "That 's a real good mule, only he 's been driven as wheel mule to an ambulance, and he refuses to go without a leader. If you will trot your horse down the road, Clayborne, you will find me sailing after you like a bird in the air."

Both the Claybornes laughed heartily at the sight of the big newspaper correspondent solemnly

waiting for his beast to rise. This the mule did with great deliberation, and stood quietly twitching his tail and shaking his big ears while Chesterfield beat the dirt out of him with his riding-whip, as if he were a dusty carpet.

"Why don't you sell him and get a horse?" laughingly inquired Gordon.

"Sell him? Why, I can't give him away; and I've had such bad luck with horses. Two have been stolen, one died on my hands, three have mysteriously disappeared, and one had the ill grace to get shot from under me. I took this beast because no one will steal him. He can live on anything or nothing, and is impervious to bullets. All he requires is another animal ahead of him to encourage him."

"Why don't you hire a boy to ride in front of you as a sort of postilion?" suggested Gordon.

"That 's a capital idea, Clayborne. I 'll put it into immediate execution. I have a great deal of work on hand. I want to get the first interview with the leading generals on both sides. I am now on my way to find General Longstreet."

"My brother here, Major Clifford Clayborne, will doubtless be able to tell you where General Longstreet is to be found. Clifford, let me make you acquainted with my particular friend, Benjamin Chesterfield of St. Louis. Chesterfield has been through the war from start to finish, and his reports have made him famous."

"I have read many of your articles, Mr. Ches-

terfield," said Clifford, laughing. "We got the Northern papers quite regularly in Richmond during the blockade, but I never expected to meet the distinguished author."

"The Clayborne Horse, Major, has been a household word with us. 'As daring a devil as a Clayborne raider' is a familiar expression, and I am glad that my first meeting is of a friendly nature and not with you upon your black horse, riding down upon me with drawn sword."

"Oh, we never would harm a knight of the quill, Mr. Chesterfield," was the reply. Then, with a shadow across his handsome face, Clifford added, "The Clayborne Horse will never ride again. We are your prisoners now. The South has been beaten, but if we had it to go all over again, I still think we might win."

Chesterfield shook his head as he mounted his mule. "You should not have challenged the North, Major, without counting noses. We had more men and more money. We told you so at the start, but you would not listen to us. Yet it was a hard task you set for us, and let us thank God it's over, and all be friends." Then turning to Gordon in his quick way, he said: —

"I want you to capture General Ware for me. I have discovered his reluctance to talk to newspaper men, and I am very anxious to interview him."

"I will endeavor to catch the general for you and do my best to make him talk, but the devil

himself could not make him open his lips when he chooses to be silent."

"It does beat the devil, then, how communicative the general is with you, Clayborne," replied Chesterfield quickly.

"That 's to make up for long silence and disapproval on his part," was the laughing rejoinder. Clayborne could afford to laugh now, for General Ware and he had at last met under more favorable circumstances, and the general had not only accepted the inevitable, but after becoming acquainted with his future son-in-law, had declared him to be a man to be trusted. This from General Ware meant an indorsement for life.

A commissary wagon laden with grain for the hungry prisoners came rolling merrily along. With a wave of his hand and a cheery "Here 's my opportunity!" Chesterfield fell in behind it, leaving the two brothers to gallop off in the opposite direction.

They rode side by side, as they had ridden many years before, with the same gallant bearing that belonged to them both.

"Dismount here," said Gordon a few minutes later, springing from his horse before one of the few houses Appomattox could boast. Opening the gate, he made his way through a garden glorious with spring flowers. Violets and daffodils made the air soft with their perfume. Amid this scene of peace stood Marjorie Ware, looking as fragrant

and sweet as one of the half-opened roses with the morning dew fresh upon its petals.

Clifford Clayborne stopped at the sight of her, and raised his ragged cap from his head with a graceful air of politeness.

"Clifford," said Gordon, "this lady is Miss Marjorie Ware, who has honored me by consenting to become my wife."

A look of amazement came to Clifford's face; he had recognized at once the young woman who had thrown herself upon his protection at the house near the cross-roads. The grave events of the past few days had driven all else out of his mind. Until this moment he had not given her a second thought; but Clifford was a man who never was at loss for a word. He was always at his ease, whether dressed in rags or attired in purple and fine linen. He stepped forward with his most polished manner and took Marjorie by the hand, saying: —

"I give you my most earnest wish for happiness, sister. In my present state that is all I have to give you."

There was an appearance of shyness and reserve in Marjorie's manner as she took his hand, but her bright blue eyes looked earnestly into his face. She, too, recalled vividly how he had championed her, how her heart had sunk when he had ridden suddenly away.

Clifford leaned forward and kissed her gently on the forehead. "I could not wish Gordon Clay-

borne a prettier or sweeter bride," he exclaimed gallantly.

"I am sure I could not ask for a truer brother than Clifford Clayborne," she replied. As she spoke the thought of her own brother rushed into her mind; there was an accent of sadness in the words and a shade of deep regret settled on her face. Gordon saw the shadow, and with that clear insight which love gives knew the cause. He left his betrothed in conversation with his brother, and stepping into another path walked among the flowers, while he pondered how he could find Francis Ware, and perhaps regenerate him for the sister's sake.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CLAYBORNE BROTHERS

STANDING under the trees upon a knoll a little removed from the scene of the great drama, Regina Bowie viewed the surrender at Appomattox. Her dark lashes were wet with tears of anger and pain as she saw the regiments which she loved so well mournfully give up their arms upon the field of their last battle. Her heart was bitter with abhorrence and hatred for the victors; it was tender with pity and love for the vanquished.

To her side came Francis Ware. He was thinner and paler than ever. Disease had racked his body and passion was consuming his soul. Taking from under his worn coat a little packet, he placed it in the young woman's hand.

"Regina, this is the flag you made for the Clayborne Horse. I managed to secrete it. I have kept it hidden and bring it back to you now, thinking you would like to have it."

Her look softened as she took the blackened remnant.

"Thank you, Frank, you 're a right good fellow, and you always have been a true friend of mine." She shook out the tattered folds to the breeze, saying with renewed fierceness: —

"No, they shall never have this. I will die first and have it wrapped about me for a shroud. They have set their iron heel upon my country; they have ruined that forever; they have crushed out the spirit of liberty; they have killed most of our best and bravest, and will enslave all whom their swords have spared, but I will never yield to them; never, never!"

"Regina," said young Ware with solicitude, "do not work yourself into such a frenzy. The end has come. Why not accept the inevitable?"

"And take the oath of allegiance?" she cried. "I will kill myself first!" and she struck her breast with her clinched fist.

"Regina, listen to me," said Ware, his voice breaking with emotion. "I love you. For you I gave up that which a man should hold dearest, — his honor. I do not regret it," he continued hurriedly, "for I love you more than country or honor and all else in the world. Become my wife. I will work for you, slave for you. I am young, I am strong. Though I may look feeble now, I am really strong, Regina. Let us go away together, far away from this country. Somewhere the world is fair, my adored one. The most distant land would be a paradise with you and love. Will you not marry me, now? I have waited so long."

She stood quietly with a look in her wondrous eyes much softer and gentler than had been there for many a long day.

"Frank," she said, speaking slowly in her low, sweet tone, "I do not love you."

"But you must, my adored, you must!" he cried feverishly. "Such love as mine must kindle some response in your heart."

She shook her head sadly, saying: —

"Frank, I 'd give the world to love as you do, but I cannot."

"Try," he cried, seizing her hand; "try, that is all I ask."

"I cannot; it is not in me. Listen to me now, Frank. I never cared for you as much as I do at this moment: what I say now is for your good. Leave me, Frank, my dear fellow. Leave me, and then let me go my own way."

"I cannot, Regina."

"It is for your own good."

"But where are you going?" he asked wildly. "What spot will you find whither I cannot follow?"

"I shall leave this land," she cried, striking her heel into the turf. "I shall go to Mexico, or to England, or France. I do not know where, but I shall never take the oath of allegiance here to the despots."

"May I not follow? I *will* follow you, Regina, wherever you go."

"I cannot prevent your following me. I like to have you with me, but I tell you for your own good not to come. I am going to leave you now, Frank. If you seek me out, I shall not give you such good advice another time. I am not always so disinterested. Good-by, Frank."

"I shall see you again, Regina," he replied, putting his lips to her hand.

"Think it all over first, Frank," she answered, turning quickly away.

Francis Ware walked up and down under the trees where she had left him; with bowed head he walked back and forth, thinking deeply.

Benjamin Chesterfield, having given his recalcitrant mule to a colored boy, was making better progress by the use of his own legs, when he saw Regina Bowie ride swiftly away from a clump of trees that crested a hillock near at hand. She passed near enough to see and recognize the big correspondent, and as she went by she waved her hand with an imperious, half-defiant gesture. And thus she rode away, the tears scarcely dry upon her cheeks, but with a look of pride on her handsome face; unyielding, unsubdued, defiant to the last.

As she disappeared from sight, Chesterfield's eye went back to the man she had left. Chesterfield, who never forgot a name or a face, was obliged to look more than twice at the gaunt figure striding back and forth under the trees, before he could be sure as to its identity. He approached noiselessly, and put his hand upon the young man's shoulder, saying in his deep, healthful voice: —

"Francis."

The latter started and looked up.

"Good God! You, Chesterfield!" then sud-

denly lowering his eyes. "Don't look at me, man! Don't touch me! Don't speak to me!"

"Frank, my boy, I understand it all, and I shall speak to you," replied the big man gently.

"What do you understand?" cried the other fiercely, looking full into Chesterfield's eyes, his own face on fire.

"About her, old chap," replied Chesterfield, laying his hand on Ware's shoulder tenderly.

"Do you understand that I am a disgraced and ruined man?" replied the boy; "that if I am caught by the Federals, I shall be shot as a deserter? I am so changed I did not think any one would recognize me. I am down on the Confederate muster-rolls under another name. If my true name becomes known, I shall be sentenced to die a miserable death. Oh, Chesterfield, what of my poor sister? What about my unhappy father? I never realized it so fully as at this moment."

"I will not betray you."

"I almost wish you would. I wish you would take your revolver and shoot me now. Say, won't you do it, Chesterfield?"

"Frank," said the big man sternly, "control yourself and listen to reason."

"Reason! I abandoned that long ago," was the reply, with a dry laugh.

"Frank," said Chesterfield in his cool, convincing way, "you shall come with me. I will put you where you shall be safe for the present. I know enough of the temper of the country and of

those in power to feel sure that later many things will be overlooked. Later, when blood is cooler, you will be pardoned."

"I deserve no pardon. I desire none."

"Frank, I liked you when I knew you in the early days of the war. I 'm not a man to change my friendship easily. I 'm an older man than you, and I 'm going to help you out of this damned bad scrape, and you 've got to come with me."

"And leave her, Chesterfield? I cannot."

"You must leave her. You 've got to be a man, Frank."

"You don't know what you ask," cried Ware wildly. "You could n't do it, Chesterfield, if you loved as I do."

"I do know," replied Chesterfield, speaking in a voice so low as to be scarcely audible. "I once loved a woman. To me she seemed as fair as Helen of Troy. She was as fair as Helen, as fickle as Manon Lescaut, as cold-hearted as Beatrix Esmond, with the grace and beauty and wit and vanity and deceit of all the heartless women who have held men in thrall since the world began. I left her. It was bitter at the time; but I did it, and you 've got to take your medicine too, Frank."

"I never knew that of you, Chesterfield," said Ware, looking at his friend with interest.

"It was long ago, Frank, when I was just about your age and just about such a young fool."

"Tell me more," said Frank, with that craving which the miserable have for companionship.

"Some day, perhaps, but not now. I will tell you now what I propose to do at present. The war is over, Frank. I am a man who longs for excitement and action. I am going to the West. You shall come with me. You shall live out under the sky, you shall look up at the stars at night. You shall ride over the plains, and fill your lungs with the pure air of the mountains. You 're young, my lad, you 're nothing but a boy yet. Come and be a man, Frank. Come and live with men. You 've got a long life before you. Will you come, Frank?" He laid his hand again on the young fellow's arm, speaking with persuasive charm.

Francis Ware hesitated. The struggle within him caused his slight frame to tremble, but he looked into Chesterfield's clear eyes, and answered: —

"Yes, I 'll come, Chesterfield."

"Good!" cried the correspondent. "And you won't weaken later, Frank? Promise me on your honor, no matter what happens, you 'll keep your word with me."

"On my honor, Chesterfield, what there is left of it, I 'll go with you, and be a man again."

Chesterfield drew his arm through that of young Ware and led him in the direction of a distant house.

"Where are you taking me?" inquired Ware, hanging back.

"I am going to take you to that house which

stands back from the road, almost hidden by fruit trees."

The young man broke away from Chesterfield.

"Don't take me where I shall see any one who knows me. Good God! I could not look any of my old associates in the face. I don't understand how I can bear to see you, but some way you seem different. And if you had shot me, Chesterfield, I should have felt almost grateful."

"Frank," said Chesterfield, stopping short and looking down into the other's face with an earnest light in his own eyes, "I want you to trust me absolutely for a while. I want you to leave yourself entirely in my hands, knowing that I will do nothing which can injure you."

Chesterfield had about him that manner of strong self-reliance and hopefulness which inspires confidence. Ware hesitated only for a moment, then replied with more composure than he had yet shown: —

"I 'll trust you, Chesterfield, to the last."

"Come on, then!" exclaimed the big fellow in his cheeriest voice; and as they walked, he enlivened the way by light conversation, jest, and anecdote, as if they were out for an afternoon stroll.

As they drew near the blossoming garden, Chesterfield made a slight détour, which made them approach the place from the rear. At the lower end of the orchard, screened by blossoming fruit trees,

was an old summer-house with a rose-bush twining about it in rich profusion. Here Chesterfield left his charge for a few moments, while he passed around the house to the front. Francis Ware dropped upon a seat, and with his head supported by his hand sat listening to the hum of the insects among the flowers, while he drank in the rich fragrance of the spring. The moral support of Chesterfield's strong presence temporarily withdrawn, the reaction set in. Ware felt himself grow weak and dizzy, his heart beat with an irregular throb, his head sank lower upon his breast.

Thus Marjorie found him as she entered hurriedly through the roses. He sprang to his feet. With a glad cry like that of a mother when she regains a wayward child, Marjorie threw her arms about him, drawing his head down to her bosom to kiss him, with that great love, that tenderness and entire forgiveness which are found only in a woman's heart.

Finally Frank Ware arose from where he had been seated for some time in silence, with his sister's little hand in his, and speaking with more of his old spirit said: —

"Chesterfield is the grandest man alive, little sister."

She looked into his face with a radiant smile. In her present state of happiness she would not gainsay him, although in her heart she knew there was a still grander man. Besides, she was not thinking so much of what he said as of the fact

that he, her brother, who had been dead, was now standing there before her. Very changed he was, but she could see the Frank of old in his brown eyes. She wanted to take him to her heart and nurse him back to renewed life and strength.

"Where is he now?" inquired Ware.

"Who, Gordon?" she asked innocently.

"No, Chesterfield, of course."

"He is in the front of the house with Mr. Clayborne. Shall I ask them to come to you, dear?"

"No, only Chesterfield. I want to see him, for we must go."

"Are you going away? Are you not going to see father? Have you not come to stay? Oh, Frank, do not go," and she threw her arms about him protectingly, as if she feared for his safety.

"I cannot see any one but Chesterfield. I must go away, my dear. I cannot see father yet."

"Oh, Frank!" she exclaimed imploringly, holding him fast in her arms.

"Do not fear, I shall not go back to *her*. I am going away with Chesterfield. I will see you again, my dear sister."

She left him and returned with Chesterfield, who if not the grandest man alive in her eyes, stood very high in her affection now.

Francis Ware gave his sister a parting embrace, she spoke a few words of tender solicitude, and then he left her and went away as he had come, with the big-hearted Chesterfield towering above

him. As Frank walked he drew himself up, and already looked more like the man he was to be.

Marjorie watched the two men until they passed out of sight, then waited until the tears were dry in her eyes before she rejoined the man who to her was the grandest of them all.

Gordon Clayborne was standing by the gate to say a parting word to his brother. Clifford, on the other side, held Gordon by the hand. He was going back to his own men and with them to fulfill the conditions of the parole.

Marjorie stood a little distance off and looked at the two brothers. Tall, graceful, soldierly they were, with the proud bearing of true gentlemen. In front of the house, high above their heads, its glorious colors sparkling in the sun, flew the American flag.

"Gordon," said Clifford, his voice deep with emotion, "I love the cause I have fought for. The flag of Virginia, God bless her, is dearer to me at this moment than on the day when we first flung it to the breeze in defiance of the North. But we have been fairly beaten. The flag which is flying above us both as we stand here is my flag also, and there 's not a man in this country who will be more true to the stars and stripes than I."

"Clifford, my brother," replied the elder, "we are both Americans, and I thank God; and the day will come when every brave man who fought against it will from the depth of his heart thank

God that the old flag flies over one country, *our* country, Clifford."

Thus for a moment they separated, and with a look of warm affection in his eyes Gordon watched Clifford as he rode off on his black horse, as true-hearted a knight as ever held a sword.

CHAPTER XXIX

A THIRD OF A CENTURY LATER

THIRTY-THREE years have passed since the Clayborne Horse rode their last charge. The scene has changed from the scars of a battlefield to the productive land of a western ranch, from the destruction of war to the fecundity of peace. Surrounded by broad and fruitful acres stands a large house whose wide doors and porches betoken the open-handed hospitality of the country.

In front of this generous mansion, upon a tall staff, its brilliant colors made more glorious by the rays of the western sun, flies the national flag.

This is the home of Francis Ware, who has become a man of substance, with a wife and a flourishing family, which has grown up to sturdy manhood.

Another war has been fought, in which the sons of the Puritan Ware and the sons of the Clayborne Cavaliers have marched shoulder to shoulder, and fought side by side, under the flag of a united country. And now, with the restoration of peace, the families of Clayborne and of Ware have come together in reunion to celebrate a national holiday. Around Francis Ware's generous board they make

no mean show of numbers, for their families have increased liberally in these thirty years.

Seated in the place of honor is Benjamin Chesterfield, white haired and white bearded, but carrying his threescore and ten years upon his broad shoulders unbendingly; his voice just as deep and his handshake as hearty as when he was a correspondent at the front, a third of a century ago. He has been many times around the world since then, and rubbed shoulders with all sorts of men in every land; and the big heart beats just as warmly for his fellowmen as it did in the old war days.

To-day there is even a warmer glow in old Ben Chesterfield's heart as he looks at those about him.

There are Gordon and Clifford Clayborne, veterans of two wars, joking and laughing together, with the spirit of the youngest at the table. Clifford Clayborne's hair is still dark and curly. He looks like his father, the old colonel, whose bones have long laid at rest with those of his comrades of the old war times. Clifford is the same gallant, vivacious spirit he has been since boyhood. His knight-errant heart, after breaking many a lance with Cupid in the tilt-yard of love, finally capitulated to the charms of a young woman described by her fair rivals as a "plain but sensible girl," but whom Clifford stoutly maintained was the fairest of them all. And as he believes the same to-day, it can be safely argued that, contrary to the prediction of his friends, he has proved a devoted and a faithful husband.

Gordon Clayborne has served in the army for a third of a century. The vocation of a soldier is an arduous one; it rarely lies in a bed of roses, and does not always lead by a path of incessant glory. Gordon Clayborne has won honorable distinction in his career; he has earned the shoulder-straps of a general, and the right to retire and spend the remainder of his days in ease, which is not inglorious after a life of activity and strife.

These thirty years have changed Marjorie Clayborne's hair from golden-brown to soft gray, but the delicate color still comes to her cheeks, and her blue eyes shine brightly. Youth cannot lay claim to all the comeliness in the world. There is a loveliness that comes to age, where the spirit is young and the mind serene, which frequently transcends the more vivid beauty of youth.

"Ben Chesterfield, here 's a toast," called Gordon Clayborne in a hearty tone.

The cloth had been removed, the glasses filled, and with one accord all rose to their feet as General Clayborne spoke. Chesterfield's bright gray eyes made the circuit of the table, his gaze resting with particular sympathy and affection upon the younger generation. His stout old heart beat with pride as he looked upon their fine, clear-cut faces, radiant with life and health, the best product of American manhood and womanhood — the men hardy and muscular, the girls almost as tall as the men, and fully as self-reliant, their independence of spirit and the graceful freedom of their move-

ments detracting not a whit from their womanly charm.

General Clayborne, the ardent fire of patriotism lighting up his face, gave the toast: —

"To our country!"

It was drunk with fervor; then a burst of cheers shook the great rafters of the house.

"America may well be proud of such children," said old Chesterfield to himself earnestly. "My dear friends," he said aloud, as soon as he could make himself heard above the noise, "the love of country is one of the noblest of human sentiments, and your vigorous young lungs have already bespoke your patriotism."

"You 're right there, Uncle Ben, we can lick any other country on the face of the earth!" piped in a diminutive scion of the third generation, who had insisted on coming to the feast accoutred from head to foot in his new rough-rider's costume, and who never hesitated to offer his comments upon the topic of the moment.

Chesterfield smiled affectionately upon the small interloper.

"Yes," he continued, "every one of you should believe that our country is the strongest, the richest, the greatest in the world. I believe it, and I always shall."

"Three cheers for Uncle Ben Chesterfield!" cried one of the young men, and again the rafters rang.

"Your fathers and I have had our day," continued the veteran newspaper man.

"No, no!" cried a dozen voices, "you 're still as young as any of us."

"We are in spirit, but we have done our work. We have struggled with the problems of our day; whether success or failure has been ours we have done our best, and we now leave other and greater problems for you to solve. The country is now in the hands of a younger generation. You, with the bone and sinew, with the spirit and enthusiasm of youth, must hold the reins. If this country is the most favored under God's sun, so much the greater is your responsibility.

"My dear friends," continued Chesterfield earnestly and with emotion, a note of prophecy sounding in his voice, "the destiny of nations has called our country to the front; for many years to come the history of America is to be the history of the world. May she make that history worthy of her name! May she be great, not alone in commercial supremacy and foreign conquest, but in the supremacy of great thoughts, high ideals, and noble deeds, that the torch of Liberty may in truth light the whole world! May each one of you in the depth of his heart resolve to do his utmost to make his country worthy of its place among the nations of the world! This is the trust which accompanies your inheritance. The richest heritage a man can have is a birthright in this republic. A grander patent of nobility than any the old world can bestow is conveyed in the five words, 'I AM AN AMERICAN CITIZEN.'"

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